Are the Exceptions Really the Rule?

Questioning the Application of 'Electoral-Professional' Type Models of Party Organisation in East Central Europe

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Abstract

Much writing on party organisational development in post-communist East Central Europe has argued that, with the partial exception of successor parties to former regime parties, political parties in the region will be state-centred, low-membership organisations dominated by political elites, which loosely approximate to the 'cartel' and 'electoral-professional' models of party identified by some scholars in Western Europe. This pattern of development in East Central Europe is seen as reflecting the specific opportunity structures of post-communist societies, which both shape politicians' organisational strategies and determine available resources for party building.

Using a detailed re-examination of the Czech case, this paper questions the applicability of such models. It argues that their use is problematic not simply because of inherent difficulties of model fitting, but because they underestimate the path dependent character of party organisational development in the region and, especially the extent to which viable parties appear to have drawn on organisational resources accumulated under the old regime and during transition. The combination of path dependency and post-communist opportunity structures, it is argued, tends to create hybrid party organisations, which are removed from 'electoral professional' type parties in a number of ways. The paper concludes by suggesting possible avenues for rethinking party organisational development in the region.

<u>1. Introduction</u>

While considerable scholarly attention has been devoted to emerging patterns of cleavage and inter-party competition in East Central Europe, research on parties in the region as <u>organisations</u> linking state and society has remained relatively underdeveloped. Moreover, much of the work that has been done on party organisation development in the region has focused heavily on attempts to apply models of party organisation developed in a West European context to East Central Europe. These have often proved problematic, however, especially when confronted with detailed empirical findings from the region. In this paper I would like to address this broader debate by critically reassessing one aspect of current thinking on party formation and party organisation in post-communist East Central Europe: the expectation that the optimum, most efficient, and therefore most likely, model of party organisation will be (and is) a rough approximation to the elite-based 'electoral-professional' or 'cartel' type party said to be emerging in Western Europe. Using a detailed case study of party organisation and party development in the Czech Republic after 1989, I will argue that the difficulties in applying this model arise not only because of the inherent complexity of empirical data and the difficulty of exporting models developed and Western Europe, but also because, despite the caveats introduced by some analysts, the path dependent <u>process</u> of party organisational development in the region has been neglected.

On the basis of the Czech case, I will then suggest that pattern of party organisation we might expect to find in East Central Europe is less a dichotomous split between small 'new' parties roughly following the 'electoral-professional' model and 'old' former regime parties preserving elements of traditional 'mass' party organisation, than path dependently formed hybrids based on the <u>transformation</u> of pre-existing

political organisation. By pre-existing political organisation we should understand not only mean the 'mass' legacy of former ruling and 'satellite' parties, but also the 'organisational capital' embodied in short-lived transitional mass movements and resources passed to 'historic parties' by political exiles and international actors. Such 'path dependent' development implies that few, if any, viable real-life parties in East Central Europe will closely resemble the rational-efficient 'electoral professional' or 'cartel' party models. I will conclude by briefly reflecting on the implications of these findings for the use of party models in the region and the ways in which post-communist party organisational development is theorised.

2. Towards The 'Electoral-Professional' Party in East Central Europe?

Most specialists agree that there are a number of historical, structural and conjunctural factors, which make the context of party organisational emergence in post-communist East Central Europe quite different from that in Western Europe in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. These factors include: an inherited 'anti-party' culture and a suspicion of politics and political organisation; the lack of clear (or clearly understood) social identities and socio-economic interests; the weakness of civil society and organised interest groups and, correspondingly, the relative importance of the state as a resource base for parties; the fluid nature of post-communist electorates and tendency for electoral markets to be 'open'; the trend for parties to founded 'internally' from above by transition-era elites, rather than 'externally 'on the basis of social movements; the growth in the reach and importance of the electronic media; and the greater need of parties to control and occupy the state, given the politically-led nature of post-communist transformation[1].

There had also been broad consensus among scholars in deducing the <u>type</u> of party organisation that such a set of 'opportunity structures' should logically imply: small, low-membership organisations dominated by office-holders, political professionals and party elites, which neither have (nor seek) any real presence in civil society, but instead rely on the state, the media and the electoral nexus to link with voters. Kitschelt, for example, in an early and influential article, anticipated 'loose associations of professionals with little local entrenchment and no transmission belts into target constituencies'.[2] Mair, writing in the mid-1990s, spoke of 'the maintenance of' elitist party organisations, even in the medium to long term'[3]. Kopecký's more detailed study hypothesised 'formations with loose electoral constituencies, in which a relatively unimportant role is played by party membership, and the dominant role of party leaders'.[4] Similarly, Szczerbiak in his recent research on Poland postulates '[parties] characterised by a weak grounding in civil society arising from a low membership base and the low priority assigned to building up local structures and a high level of dependence on the state for financial and material resources ... a centralised pattern of decision-making alongside a high level of autonomy given to basic and intermediary structures on local decisions'.[5]

Such expectations concerning East Central Europe have been conceptualised almost exclusively using theoretical models first developed in the literature on party organisational development in Western Europe. This literature traces the development of West European parties from the loose 'caucuses' of notables organised through the parliamentary factions and elite social networks of a pre-democratic age; to the 'branch-mass' party or 'party of mass integration' of the late 19th and early 20th centuries; through an intermediate stage of the more loosely organised, less class-based post-1945 'catch-all party';[6] to the more streamlined 'electoral-professional'

party', 'cartel party' or 'business-firm'[7] models of party characterised by fluid and fragmented electorates, low memberships, elite domination, and a reliance on state resources, the electronic media and externally purchased professional expertise. It is to this final, most contemporary set of models that the type of party organisation implied by East Central European political and social conditions is usually related. Indeed, it has even been suggested that, unencumbered by the historical, organisational and ideological baggage of long-established parties in Western democracies, East Central European parties are 'leapfrogging' West European parties in developing 'purer', more advanced 'electoral-professional' and 'cartel' party forms of organisation.[8]

At a high level of generalisation, such expectations are broadly confirmed. Leaving aside the exceptional cases of the Czech Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (KSÈM) and the Hungarian Christian Democrats, no truly 'mass' parties exist either in terms of size or encapsulation of distinct social constituencies[9]. Moreover, it is clear that levels of party membership, organisational density, voter-party identification and social implantation in East Central Europe are, in almost all cases, significantly inferior to those in both Western and Southern Europe.[10] Viewed in terms of internal power relationships too, in many cases, there is significant concentration and overlapping of party and state/parliamentary elites, who seem to enjoy significant autonomy.[11] Thus as in Poland, so in the region generally, it seems that parties 'exhibit more of the characteristics evident in contemporary models of party organisation - catch-all, electoral-professional and cartel - than those of the traditional mass party'.[12]

However, when empirical data on party membership and organisation in East Central European states is examined in detail a more complex picture emerges. While most 'new' parties descended from pre-1989 opposition groupings or formed after 1989

seem to conform to the 'electoral-professional' or 'cartel' model, former regime parties seem to retain significant aspects of traditional mass party organisation. Lewis, for example, notes 'the relative strength, organizational resilience and relatively high membership levels of former communist parties and allied organizations' as well as their good financial and material resource base.[13] Similar conclusions are reached by Kopecký in his detailed survey of party organisation in the Czech Republic, where both the Communist Party and the Christian Democratic Union-Czechoslovak People's Party, a former satellite party, stand out because of the size and density of their organisational networks and the loyalty and stability of their electorates.[14] Szczerbiak's regionally-based analysis of Polish party organisation in 1997 too reveals 'a sharp contrast between the two 'successor' parties and the three 'new' parties' with the former enjoying 'a relatively robust level of membership, organisation and material resources compared with those completely 'new' parties that have emerged since 1989'.[15]

Although analysts disagree over the scope and importance of organisational dissimilarities between 'successor' and 'new' parties,[16] on first examination the anomaly seems a relatively simple one, explicable in terms of the 'organisational inheritance' and cultural continuity from the communist regime and, in some cases, the pre-communist period.[17] Such organisational legacies, analysts suggest, might in a limited number of cases simply 'mask or simply work against' the general, underlying tendency for East Central European parties to evolve towards the 'electoral professional' model,[18] making successor parties 'partial exceptions' to this general tendency.[19]

However, close analysis of other aspects of party organisation, such as patterns of elite domination or professionalization, reveals a number of further inconsistencies. Van

Biezen's recent work on the internal power dynamics of parties in Hungary and the Czech Republic, for example, which, while highlighting the overlapping of parliamentary and party elites, suggests that party head offices not parliamentary elites are the more powerful actors.[20] Moreover, as Szczerbiak demonstrates, while Polish parties typically lack both significant mass memberships and large paid central apparatuses, there are only limited signs of the capital-intensive 'electoral-professionalization' of party organisation and party campaigning through the buying in of media and policy expertise.[21]

Analysts engaged in such fine grain research, have, therefore, tended to shy away from even qualified generalisations about the usefulness of models such 'electoral-professional' and 'cartel' party types in East Central Europe.[22] This uneasy relationship between detailed empirical research and existing models of party suggests that some degree of re-thinking may need to take place. In the following sections, I would like to consider some possible lines which such a rethinking might follow through a detailed re-examination and reinterpretation of the Czech case.

3. The Czech Case Revisited:

As in many Central European democracies, Czech party politics has moved from a state of flux and instability following the collapse of communist rule to a semi-consolidated, programmatically-structured party system with 5-6 key actors.[23] In terms of party organisation and party-society links, the Czech case exhibits the same loosely 'electoral-professional' tendencies seen throughout the region,[24] but is unusual in that the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (KSÈM) has retained a communist identity and mass organisation rather than becoming a post-communist social democratic party. In the following analysis, I therefore focus on the development of

three mainstream parties, which by the late 1990s had emerged as the most powerful actors in the Czech party system, accounting for 69% of votes cast and 76% of deputies at the most recent (1998) legislative elections. These three parties are: the Czechoslovak People's Party (ÈSL),[25] a centre-right Catholic party with roots going back to the 19th century, which existed as a 'satellite' party under communist rule; the Social Democrats (ÈSSD), a 'historic' party banned under communist rule; and the powerful centre-right, Civic Democratic Party (ODS) led by Václav Klaus, a 'new' party formed in 1991. The analysis will trace the process of party formation and organisational development from 1989, paying particular attention to the 'genesis' period of the three parties in 1989-91.[26]

Table 1: Organisational data on the Czechoslovak People's Party (ÈSL) (later Christian Democratic Union - Czechoslovak People s Party (KDU-ÈSL)) 1990-1999.

Date	Direct members	No. of party basic units
1990 (1 Jan)	48 037[*]	1448
1990 (1 Apr)	87 237	2324
1990 (1 Sept)	96 372	no data
1990 (Dec)	95 435	2387
1991 (Feb)	95 056	2403
1991 (Aug)	94 377	2401
1992	88 737	2437
1993	100 000 (est)	no data
1995 (Nov)	80 000	no data
1999 (Feb)	60 396	no data

Source: Internal party bulletins and Czech press
[*] Later estimates imply a membership of 50 958 on 1 January 1990

Detailed analysis of this period immediately raises a number of questions about accepted accounts of post-communist party development. The first point highlighted is that *the notion of 'organisational inheritances' needs extending to embrace not only 'frozen' organisational resources built up under communism and historical party*

traditions, but also the 'live' organisational legacies of political and social mobilisation in and around the 'transition' period in 1989-90 This can be illustrated by examining the impressive growth in 1989-90 in the memberships and organisational networks of the Czechoslovak People's Party (ÈSL), the former satellite party, and the revived 'historic' Czech Social Democrats Party (see tables 1 and 2). In the course of 1990, the Czechoslovak People's Party (ÈSL) more than doubled both its membership and the number of local branches, creating by late 1990 what can reasonably be termed a mass organisation of almost 100, 000 members from a 'satellite' party membership of approximately 20, 000 (see table 1).

Table 2: Organisational Data on Czechoslovak Social Democracy (later Czech Social Democratic Party) (ÈSSD) 1990-1999

Year	Direct members	No. of party basic units
1990 (Apr)	8 640 (Est. 9-10, 000]	est. 76 (Jan)
1990 (Sept)	11 823 (est. 13, 000)	501 (est. 550-580)
1991 (Mar)	12 734 (est. 13, 000+)	no data
1993	17 000	no data
1995 [Nov]	est. 12 500	no data
1997 [Dec]	est. 14 000	no data
1999 [31.1.99]	18 762	no data

Source: Internal party bulletins and Czech press (estimates from party sources)

The case of Czechoslovak Social Democracy reveals a similar pattern. ÈSSD was officially merged with the Communist Party in June 1948, but continued to exist in the West throughout communist rule as a network of political exiles. Although it had no real organisational resources in place in Czechoslovakia when the communist regime fell in November 1989, its status as a 'historic' party did give it a 'legacy' of resources to draw on. Its leaders were, for example, successful in reclaiming the

party's valuable pre-1948 Prague headquarters building from the Communist Party in January 1990. They were also able to translate the exiled ÈSSD's associate membership of the Socialist International, which it had enjoyed since the 1950s, into significant donations from otherwise cautious SI parties. More significantly, however, in the first half of 1990, although it failed to create anything approaching a mass organisation, ÈSSD succeeded in creating a nationwide political organisation of 10,000 - 11, 000 members and a professional national apparatus, numbering almost 200 staff by mid-1991. While, as with the People's Party, geographical patterns of support and breakdowns of party membership by age group and region, suggest ÈSSD was drawing on historic reservoirs of support and identification, once again these were unleashed and, to some extent augmented, by the wider political mobilisation of the transition period.[27]

A second key point that emerges in re-examining Czechoslovakia's transitional politics is *that 'organisational inheritances' should be seen is a general phenomenon affecting most if not all viable parties that have developed in East Central Europe.* While imperfectly understood, the operation of such inheritances for 'historic' and 'successor' parties like ÈSSD and ÈSL has been widely noted. However, it also seems to be the case that successful and organisationally viable 'new' parties also draw on substantial organisational inheritances.

This can be seen through an analysis of origins of the most powerful and, in the long-term, only sustained 'new' Czech party: Václav Klaus's Civic Democratic Party (ODS) and its emergence from Civic Forum (OF), the broad-based social and political movement formed in November 1989, which headed both the interim administration after 1989 and the Czech and Czechoslovak governments elected in June 1990. Despite the looseness and instability of its structures, Civic Forum was a

mass political organisation with hundreds of thousands of participants, which, in addition to state funding and the powers of patronage that incumbency implied, had by the end of 1990 (and probably earlier) created a nationwide network of local groups, a well-resourced headquarters and professionalised regional structures, which rivalled those of the Communist Party (KSÈM).[28] Much academic writing (and much of ODS's own rhetoric) has stressed that the party's formation represented a radical break with OF. However, while the break-up of Civic Forum may have represented an important change of <u>political</u> direction, in organisational terms ODS received a substantial organisational inheritance from the movement. This inheritance took the form of material resources, personnel, activists and organisational networks and structures[29] and was to be crucial for the viability of the newly-founded party, which did not receive state funding in its own right until after the June 1992 elections.

Table 3: Organisational Data on the Civic Democratic Party (ODS) 1991-1996

Year	Direct members	No. of party basic units
1991 (April)	est. 20 000	803 (Nov)
1992 (Mar)	'up to 30 000'	1000+
1993	22 000	no data
1994 (Dec)	23 489	1405
1995 (Aug)	21 365	1395
1995 (Nov)	21 803	1391
1996 (Nov)	23 434	1385

<u>Source</u>: data in ODS party bulletins and estimates in Czech press.

By early 1991, riven with disagreements over issues such as economic reform, decommunisation, Czech-Slovak relations, and the future of the movement itself, Civic Forum was on the point of break-up. When plans by the Forum's right wing, led by Václav Klaus, to transform the movement into a centre-right party brought these to a head, it agreed to divide the movement and its assets into two 'successor parties': a right-of-centre party led by and a looser centrist grouping, Civic Movement (OH). On

23 February 1991 a special Civic Forum Assembly agreed that Civic Forum's assets at national level would be split evenly between ODS and OH, but would exclude all other political groups within the Forum. Local and district Civic Fora were to agree their own arrangements for the division of their property. Given Klaus's considerable grassroots support, most agreed that most or all of their assets would be passed to ODS. Moreover, in almost every district a majority of Civic Forum's full time professional district 'managers' (officials) - nationally approximately 3/4 of the total - joined ODS, many beginning the 'pre-registration' of ODS members even before Civic Forum had formally been dissolved.[30] It is also significant that ODS membership (see table 3), which reached 20, 000 shortly after the party's foundation and remained remarkably stable thereafter, corresponds closely to the 3 % of Civic Forum voters polled in November 1990, who said they would 'definitely' join Klaus's new party. [31]

Contrary to suggestions that it 'developed from a parliamentary club',[32] it is therefore clear that the emergent ODS had considerable impetus at both elite (parliamentary) and grassroots level,[33] and derived an organisational legacy from Civic Forum without which it is unlikely that the party would have come into existence as an organisationally viable force.

The third striking point that emerges from re-examining the 'genesis' period of the three parties is that *the organisational legacies built up during the transition period were, at least in part, fostered by quite explicit, if ultimately unsustainable, strategies of creating viable mass organisations*. It is therefore not strictly accurate to assume that 'little effort is being made *or has been made* to build strong popular organizations' (my emphasis) in East Central Europe.[34] The vision of leaders of both of the Social Democrats and the People's Party, for example, in the early 1990s was

that of the traditional mass-branch party based on historic identity, mass organisation and the encapsulation of distinct historic social constituencies. Czechoslovak People's Party (ÈSL) Chairman, Josef Bartonèík, for example, stated in January 1990 that he aimed 'to build an influential and fairly large party surrounded by a widely developed spectrum of loosely affiliated structures and the widest possible circle of sympathisers..'.[35] In his view, the party would represent a distinct constituency of Christian voters and defend the interests of the Catholic Church. Similarly, Social Democrat leaders envisaged their party as 'a traditional workers' party' representing 'popular strata'[36] and planned their party's organisation and apparatus accordingly 'with its own night schools, travel agency and publishing house' as well as women's and youth organisations and sections for work in trade unions, supposedly following the blueprint of the Austrian SPO.[37] Civic Forum too, despite its loose 'movement' style of organisation and eschewal of hierarchy, and other trappings of 'party', clearly had an 'external' organisational strategy intended to promote <u>mass</u> citizen participation. In this regard, the Forum's (in)famous 1990 slogan that 'Parties are for party hacks, Civic Forum is for everyone' was not merely an artefact of dissident 'anti-political' thinking, but also an aspiration to create a mass grassroots movement. Indeed, what is striking in this period is that, although the concept of the electoral-professional framework party - usually referred in Czech to as the 'electoral party' (*volební strana*) - was widely discussed in Czechoslovakia from at least late 1990, it was, with one exception, <u>not</u> consciously adopted by any important party. Moreover, the leaders of the Civic Democratic Alliance (ODA), the one party which did consciously seek to be a small, low membership formation based on parliamentary elites, did so <u>not</u> from considerations of 'electoral-professional' organisational

rationality, but because of Burkian notions of representation, reflecting a neo-conservative ideology developed by its intellectual founders before 1989.

The organisational strategies of all three Czech would-be Czech mass organisations of the early 1990s quickly floundered. The two historic parties' early strategies, while partially successful in recreating elements of the mass party organisation, proved wholly unrealistic and unsuccessful as a means of capturing significant loyal electorates [38] and even less successful in gaining social implantation. The People's Party, for example, despite its mass membership and socially and geographically concentrated bases of support, failed to create affiliated organisations with memberships of more than a few thousand. Civic Forum, by contrast, while highly successful both electorally and as a vehicle for mass participation, saw its founders' 'mass' organisational strategy crumble in 1990 because of a lack of traditional party-mindedness on the part of its ex-dissident leaders and a failure to appreciate the need for party discipline, structures of internal democratic accountability and paid officials sufficiently quickly or clearly.[39] All such failed 'mass organisations', however, handed on organisational legacies, which were to enable and constrain the subsequent development of the three parties discussed.

4. Party Organisational Development and Path Dependency

The 'locking in' of aspects of initial organisation in a party's later organisational development is something which has been widely noted in relation to the historical formation of West European parties. It is implicit, for example, in Lipset and Rokkan's thesis about the 'freezing' of West European party systems or in Panebianco's account of party institutionalisation.[40] More recently a number of US scholars, drawing on the burgeoning 'new institutionalist' literature, have attempted to

theorise party organisational development in terms of 'path dependency'.[41] The literature on post-communist East and Central Europe has seen widespread discussion of 'legacies', usually seen in terms of socio-cultural factors or regime types.[42] Such structural notions of legacies have also been applied to party system formation in the region.[43] However, despite a number of attempts to trace stages of party system evolution in post-communist Europe, analysis of the path dependent development of party organisation across these 'stages' has remained largely descriptive and *ad hoc*.[44] Moreover, as analysis of the Czech case suggests, the nature and influence of the legacies left by early transitional organisational strategies has been overlooked, even among authors who attempt to relate the concept of 'path dependency' to East European party organisation.[45] Such analyses however overlook the fact that path dependent development is determined not only by external constraints, such as institutions, social structures or communications technologies but also by the pre-existing distribution of organisational resources. As Stark famously observed this implies that political actors in East Central Europe are

> 'rebuilding organizations and institutions not *on the ruins* but *with the ruins* as they redeploy available resources in response to their immediate practical dilemmas. .... it is through adjusting to new uncertainties that new organizational forms emerge'.[46]

The existence of significant 'inheritances' in the organisational 'ruins' of the transition period, however, is of more than purely historical importance. It has important implications for type of party organisation we should anticipate in contemporary East Central Europe. The key implication is, perhaps, that *most viable parties develop on the basis of previously existing organisations, which have already choked off genuinely new parties, by effectively monopolising most organisational*

'start-up capital'. Pure 'electoral professional' parties, therefore, were always unlikely to develop in the region. What we should, in fact, anticipate, in East Central Europe is the emergence of parties which are <u>organisational hybrids</u>, combining substantial elements of the organisations they evolved from and substantial elements of the 'electoral-professional' model, which post-communist social and political conditions imply is the optimal rational-efficient form for inter-party competition. 'Partial exceptions' to the 'electoral-professional' type party may therefore be the rule. I will now consider, how these how such hybrid organizational forms emerged in the Czech Republic in the 1990s.

<u>5. Party Evolution in Czech Republic The Transformation of Failed 'Mass' Organisation</u>

All three Czech parties under consideration developed into stable and successful actors in the mid-late 1990s after <u>transformation</u> along broadly 'electoral-professional' lines of the mass or would-be mass organisations established during the transition period after an internal crisis led to a change of leadership. In all cases the party organisations that emerged have been characterised by a tension between an 'electoral-professional' rationality introduced by the new leadership and the legacies left by the model on which the organisation was (re)founded immediately after the collapse of communism.

In November 1990, the Czechoslovak People's Party (ÈSL) elected Josef Lux as its new leader in place of Josef Bartonèík marking an important change in the party's organisational and political strategy. Rather than an advocate for a Christian constituency, Lux wanted ÈSL to be 'a conservative, popular .... genuinely right-wing party close to the centre' which would 'defend and embody the interests and needs of

ordinary people'.[47] While Bartonèík had assumed that the party could attract a large bloc of Christian-oriented voters relatively easily, Lux was aware that, beyond its limited traditional support bases, the party had little obvious appeal in a largely secular society, historically lukewarm towards Catholicism. This implied that to attract a sizeable electorate the party had to appeal to voters in programmatic terms, rather than relying on the automatic and organised support of a loyal traditional constituency. This shift was visible in the greater weight the party gave to centralised policy formation, as well as its adoption of a more explicit ideology (right-wing and conservative after 1990, centrist and social market after 1994). As part of broader policy objectives such as the creation of a civil society and the maintenance of 'social peace', however, the party also sought to advocate the interests of certain groups - families with children, pensioners and disabled people[48] and, Lux later suggested, like the German CDU, the embryonic, Czech middle classes.[49] Under Lux, ÈSL also abandoned the idea of building up mass auxiliary organisations, a change in priorities visible in the party's decline in membership from the heights of the 90 - 100, 00 recruited in 1990. By contrast, from 1996 the party moved towards centrally-run media-based campaigning centring around the personality of its leader, projecting the party as a 'tranquil force' in Czech politics. Despite enjoying much more limited electoral success compared to the Social Democrats and ODS, KDU-ÈSL did nevertheless succeed in moving beyond its largely elderly rural Catholic 'historic' constituency[50] and establishing itself as the organisational and political core of the centre-right Four Party Coalition grouping that emerged in the late 1990s after Lux's death.[51]

In 1993 Czech Social Democrats also elected a new leader, former Civic Forum MP Miloš Zeman. Zeman sought to accelerate the transformation of ÈSSD's from a

political sect with significant organisational assets but little electoral support into '...
a model of a broad pluralistic party, a party which is left-wing, but which reaches into
the political centre...'[52] capable of capturing around 30 per cent of the vote. This was
to be achieved by offering an alternative vision of social transformation with broad
appeal, rather than projecting a historic party identity, which excluded many potential
supporters (such as, for example, former communists). In November 1996 Zeman
even stated that this implied that 'because of our, to a certain extent, centrist position
(støedovou pozicí), we are what is termed in English a 'catch all party', ... a party that
very broad strata of people can vote for'.[53] As in the case of the People's Party, ÈSSD
began to re-conceive its constituency less in terms of an established, pre-existing
working class with a natural loyalty to Social Democracy and more in terms of the
prospective or emerging interests of likely 'losers' in transformation as carried out by
the Right. From the mid-1990s ÈSSD programmes therefore increasingly stressed the
idea of defending the life chances of working people and vulnerable groups as
individuals rather than as distinct social groups. Rather than justifying its advocacy of
particular interests on the grounds of history or tradition, these programmes related
them to policies seen as beneficial to society as a whole or necessary to
transformation.[54] As far as party-society links were concerned, while in ÈSSD did
seek establish contacts with pensioners', tenants' and consumers' groups, under
Zeman these were seen more as a source of potential new party members, than a
means of establishing mass social presence or a base in civil society[55]. In
organisational terms, Zeman abandoned the 'Austrian' model, calling merely for the
extension of ÈSSD organisation at local level and an increase of the party's
membership from 10 000 -15, 000 to 40 000.[56] However, the organisational and
political model adopted under Zeman stabilised the party and brought previously

unattainable electoral success, with ÈSSD emerging as the main opposition party in 1996 with 26% of the vote (compared with 4% in 1990 and 7% in 1992) and becoming the largest Czech party in 1998 with 32%.

If the transformation of the two 'historic' parties along more 'electoral-professional' lines, implied <u>broadening</u> their electoral appeal beyond limited constituencies and assigning a lower priority to 'party building', in the case of ODS, emergence from Civic Forum implied a transformation to create <u>narrower</u> but clearer organisational and ideological boundaries. ODS leaders sought to create a smaller, more disciplined formation with a greater degree of centrallised control and a distinct (anti-communist, neo-liberal) ideology, which would contrast markedly with the all-embracing mass movement-party that Civic Forum had (briefly) been. ODS leaders' vision was of programmatically-oriented, office-seeking party with an electorally mediated relationship to individuals and groups in society, rather than Civic Forum's 'corporatist' vision of substituting for an absent civil society. They therefore hoped to create a party whose estimated membership would be in the range of 20 - 60, 000 not a 'mass Leninist party' or a 'boundless' mass movement.[57] In contrast to ÈSSD and ÈSL, for whom a paid party apparatus was self-evident, political professionalism in the form of a powerful Head Office and network of regional 'managers' was also central to ODS's internal structure and ethos.[58]

In the 1990s, therefore, all three parties began to approximate more to 'electoral-professional' and 'cartel' type models as a result of internal transformations and reforms. Indeed, the tendency has been towards a scaling back of even the modest organisational goals initially set by the new wave of party transformers. Although ÈSSD membership increased slightly in the late 1990s, when the party first gained government office, memberships have remained low - below even limited goals set

by party leaderships - and seem to have been largely static and, in the case of ODS stagnant, since the early 1990s with significant local activism confined to small groups within these memberships.[59] Despite ritual appeals to increase party membership, it is also clear that, once incumbent, Czech party leaders gave a low priority to building or maintaining the party organisation. Indeed, Václav Klaus's lack of interest his party work and party fund-raising after 1992 led some to remark that he would happily have dissolved ODS and re-founded it three months before the next election.[60] Such membership levels have left all three parties heavily dependent on the state for resources.[61] Indeed as early as 1991 even ÈSL's relatively large membership was insufficient to finance even the party's district apparatuses. Moreover, as internal party critics in both ODS and ÈSSD have noted, on entering government in 1992 and 1998 policy formation in both parties was effectively transferred from the party to government, depriving both party members and party managers of any real influence.[62] In both parties the overlapping of party, parliamentary and government elites has bolstered the autonomy of such elites,[63] reflecting a 'stratarchic relationship'[64] between elite and grassroots, with ordinary members largely absorbed in local parish pump politics and ignorant of, or uninterested in national politics.[65] Moreover, since the mid-1990s, tacit agreements between ODS and ÈSSD to tolerate each other's minority administrations have increasingly led the two to act in an cartel-like fashion in 'colonising' public bodies and corporations, dividing senior posts between supporters of the two parties.

However, despite such 'electoral professional' tendencies, the three party organisations that have developed, nevertheless, embody significant legacies from the unsuccessful organisational strategies of the post-transition period that give them a more 'hybrid' quality than usually acknowledged. Firstly, however insubstantial they

may appear by West European standards, the structures and organisational networks of the three parties extend considerably beyond what they require for national electoral competition or elite recruitment. Indeed, the effective redundancy of local and regional structures is arguably at the root of the 'stratarchic' tendencies and elite-grassroots tensions visible in all three parties. In the case of ODS, in particular, 'stratarchic' tendencies appear less a facet of the 'electoral professional' model *per se*, than a direct legacy from Civic Forum, whose regional and intermediary structures were notoriously weak.

Secondly, however removed from the day-to-day or month-to-month exercise of power, such path dependently inherited structures and/or grassroots memberships are far from merely passive appendages to powerful central leaderships. In 1997 Václav Klaus was moved to complain of '...insufficient understanding of internal loyalty in ODS, clearly motivated by fear of some kind of *diktat* from the political leadership', criticising local and regional ODS organisations which 'oscillate between passivity and a tendency towards oversimplified and somewhat radical views'. In October 1997, Miloš Zeman too complained that his the Social Democratic Party's fractious regional organisations were constantly challenging the party leadership rather than recruiting new members.[66] In ODS, as in Civic Forum, district managers as paid employees of party headquarters, responsible for running district organisations, but not subordinate to them, rival and overlap elected district and regional leadership bodies, making the party's regional organisations a complex and powerful cockpit of contending interests. Moreover, particularly at moments of party crisis, such regional and grassroots structures can exert a decisive influence on parties' internal dynamics. In ODS on several occasions in the 1990s, grassroots delegates have used Congresses to veto Klaus's proposals (over, for example, his choice of candidate Deputy Chairs).

However, in 1997-8, in the wake of an explosive party financing scandal, when he found himself politically isolated within the ODS leadership, Klaus was able to mobilise grassroots majority support to defeat his political opponents using the party's limited, but functional, democratic mechanisms at a special party Congress. ÈSSD regional organisations are also a key resource for those seeking to build or challenge the 'dominant coalition' within the party. The party's Central Bohemian organisation, for example, has proved an important base for a faction challenging the leadership of Miloš Zeman, whose leaders would otherwise be dependent on his prime ministerial *largesse*.

Moreover, the dynamics of candidate selection in the Czech Republic, often taken as an approximate gauge of power relations within parties, are also highly revealing. As detailed analysis of Czech parties' nomination procedures for parliamentary candidates for the 1996 and 1998 legislative elections shows, in all three parties regional and district party organisations played the key role in candidate selection. [67] Although the dominant actors were usually regional and district executives, in some cases, as in some regions in the Social Democratic Party in 1996, there was direct balloting of grassroots members. Correspondingly, there was only a limited degree of intervention in the process by national leaderships, even where, as in the case of ODS, they had wide formal powers to do so.[68] Although the regional constituencies and list-based PR used in Czech legislative elections may partly explain the relative strength of regional organisations in candidate selection, it is clear that the internal dynamics of the parties surveyed contrast markedly with those of a purer 'electoral professional' or 'business firm' party such as Italy's *Forza Italia,* where the 'grassroots' can be effectively and continually bypassed by party elites.[69]

Overall, therefore, it can be seen that *from the early 1990s onwards there has been a tendency for major Czech parties to* <u>*converge*</u> *around a number of features, which amount to an organisational 'model' at one step removed from the electoral-professional type model* usually deduced from the political 'opportunity structures' of post-communist East Central Europe. These features can be summarised as: 1) a medium-large national organisation with a limited but effective local presence run by a professional bureaucracy at central and regional level, originating in failed 'mass' transitional strategies and elements of mass organisation existing under the communist regime; 2) internal dynamics characterised by elite domination, to some extent countered by 'redundant' regional and local structures; 3) a political appeal based on a detailed programme relating to post-communist socio-economic transformation; 4) a broad (but limited) electoral base of support defined in terms of social groups created by transformation amounting to no more than 30% of the electorate.

<u>Conclusions</u>

This paper has argued, on the basis of the Czech case, that the expectation that parties in East Central Europe can best be understood as rough approximations to models such as the 'electoral-professional' or 'cartel' party needs to be reassessed. It has suggested that organisationally and electorally viable formations, which draw on and adapt previous organisational forms to create 'hybrid' organisations may be less the exception than the rule in the region and that a renewed focus on the path dependent evolution of party organisation may yield fresh insights. The research presented here also contains a number of further implications for the comparative study of party organisation in the region, as well as a number of limitations.

Firstly, it should be noted that the nature and tempo of transitional mobilisation and its significance for subsequent party organisational development will vary between states. Thus, for example, in contrast to the Czech case where transitional mobilisation took the form of an intense burst of mass civic activism in and around the final collapse of the regime in 1989-90, in a country like Poland social mobilisation was characteristic of the <u>whole</u> of the late communist period and was historically waning at the time of Polish transition in mid-late 1989.[70]

Secondly, although the 'electoral-professional', 'cartel' and 'business firm' models remain useful ideal types, this paper suggests that more useful points of reference for understanding contemporary East Central European party organisational development may exist. This could be found, for example, through theorising from first principles or the creative reinterpretation and reapplication of existing literatures. Otto Kirchheimer's seminal essay on the 'catch all' party, for example, may merit re-reading less in the light of its anticipation of 'electoral-professional' and 'cartel' trends, than for intuitively capturing the path dependent character of parties' organisational development and the hybrid forms that this tends to produce. There are clearly parallels between the post-war evolution of traditional Western mass parties into 'catch-all' formations and the way parties in post-communist East Central Europe appear to have been built up path dependently 'with the ruins' not 'on the ruins', subsequently adapting imperfectly and partially to the imperatives of open electorates, technological change and the absence of a well-defined class structure. Given the weaker institutionalisation of earlier organisational forms in East Central Europe, however, it may be that the erosion of organisational legacies by pressures towards 'electoral professionalisation' will be more pronounced and rapid than in post-war Western Europe.

Thirdly, the paper suggests, that parties' and party leaders' organisational strategies in East Central Europe have, very often, not been guided by a rational calculus realistically matching organisational costs, benefits and resources to electoral ends within a relatively fixed set of opportunity structures. As the Czech case suggests, the early transition period is likely to be characterised by misperceptions stemming from uncertainty situation and normative desires to (re)institutionalise historic parties' or civic oppositions' organisational principles. Moreover, subsequent organisational strategies are likely to be *strategies of transformation* re-combining and reshaping pre-existing organisational resources, which require complex political crafting. The effectiveness of such crafting in recouping and transforming such 'organisational capital' will vary unpredictably from case to case. Polish political elites, for example, in contrast to the political acumen of Václav Klaus, allowed the grassroots organisational potential of the Solidarity Citizens' Committees movement, Civic Forum's Polish equivalent, to dissipate when it started to fragment in the early post-transition period in 1990-1.[71]

The analysis presented here can also be seen as feeding into a broader stream of criticism of 'cartel' type models which see them as misstating and oversimplifying the relationship between state and civil society, and as overstating the insulation of party elites from societal, grassroots and competitive pressures.[72] In this connection, the Czech case suggests that, not only is the formation of party organisation even in East Central Europe less easily accomplished through purely elite action than is often assumed, but that, as in Western Europe, the autonomy of party elites from grassroots pressures, however inconsistently exerted, should not be overestimated.

Finally, the prevalence and the success of parties with 'hybrid' organisation suggests that the model of electoral and organisational rationality embodied in 'cartel' and

'electoral-professional' type party models may itself need more sophisticated analysis. Hopkin and Paolucci's suggestion, for example, that strongly 'electoral-professional' and 'business firm' parties achieve <u>short-term</u> electoral and organisational efficiency by trading off the <u>longer-term</u> organisational stability that elements of more traditional party organisation bring, may require careful consideration. The normative and cultural factors highlighted earlier also seem in need of more explicit incorporation into discussions of party organisational development. For, while parties organised on increasingly 'electoral-professional', 'cartel' or 'business firm' lines might be formidable rational-efficient engines for electoral competition, party-voter linkage, and even governance, this case study suggests that even in a region with strong anti-party traditions as East Central Europe, such streamlined elite creations may lack the deeper cultural and historical legitimacy still accruing to mass organisational forms.

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[3] Mair, <u>What is different,</u> pp. 12 and 13.

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[10] Kopecký, 'Developing Party Organizations', p. 524; Mair, <u>What is different,</u> p. 14.

[11] Kopecký, 'Developing Party Organizations'; Szczerbiak, 'Party Structure and Organisation'; van Biezen, 'On the Internal Balance'.

[12] Szczerbiak, 'Testing Party Models', p. 535.

[13] P. G. Lewis, 'Introduction and Theoretical Framework' in P G Lewis (ed), <u>Party Structure and Organization in East-Central Europe</u>, (Aldershot: Edward Elgar, 1996), pp. 1-17, citation p. 16.

[14] Kopecký, 'Developing Party Organizations'.

[15] Szczerbiak, 'Testing Party Models', p. 527 and p. 526 respectively.

[16] Kopecký's analysis of the Czech case identifies them as significant, while Szczerbiak (2000: 31; see also 12-13)) sees differences in resources and membership as overridden by factors such as parties' participation in electoral or parliamentary blocs. 'Developing Party Organizations', p. 528 and 'Party Structure and Organisation', pp. 12-13 respectively.

[17] M. Waller, 'Party Inheritances and Party Identities' in G. Pridham and P. G. Lewis (eds), <u>Stabilising Fragile Democracies: comparing new party systems in Southern and Eastern Europe</u>, (London/New York: Routledge, 1996), pp.23-43.

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[22] Kopecký concludes that the six Czech parties he examines 'do not display characteristics which would point to a distinctive model of party organisation'. 'Developing Party Organizations', p. 529. Szczerbiak introduces 'caveats and qualifications' relating to, for example, absence of cartel type behaviour among political elites and weakly established notions of 'party'. 'Party Structure and Organisation', pp. 31-4. Van Biezen notes the 'limited values of established models of party formation and organization'. 'On the Internal Balance', p. 410.

[23] H. Kitschelt et al, <u>Post-Communist Party Systems: Competition, Representation and Inter-Party Collaboration</u>, (Cambridge: CUP, 1999).

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[30] Hanley, 'Normative Concepts', pp. 188-214 and 347-8.

[31] 'OF politickou stranou?', Svobodné slovo, 27 November 1990.

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[64] Kopecký, 'Developing Party Organizations', p. 526.

[65] 'Klaus vytýká ODS stejné problémy jaké vidí Zeman v sociální demokracii', <u>Mladá fronta Dnes</u>, 3 November 1997, p.2.

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