

DRAFT COPY

Czech Republic: Teaching About Multi-Party Parliamentary Politics

Overview of the structure of the Czech Republic Parliament

There are 200 delegates in the Chamber of Deputies (lower house) in the Czech Republic. Delegates are elected from 14 districts to a four-year term of office under a **proportional voting system**. A vote of no confidence or serious disagreements within the governing coalition can lead to the dissolution of the Chamber of Deputies and force new elections. A party must receive at least 5 per cent of the vote to get into Parliament.

The Senate (upper house) has 81 members, elected for six-year terms in single-member districts with a simple majority voting system. One-third of the Senate comes up for election every two years. Unlike the Chamber of Deputies, it cannot be dissolved. The Senate can return bills to the lower house, but neither the Senate nor the President has veto power.

The President is chosen by both chambers of Parliament and the Prime Minister is chosen by the lower house.

June 2002 Election Results: 200 seats

	Percent	Seats
Czech Social Democratic Party	30.2	70
Civic Democratic Party	24.5	58
Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia	18.5	41
Coalition:	14.3	31
Christian Democratic Union/Czechoslovak People's Party		(22)
& Freedom Union/Democratic Union		(9)

Simulation: Proportional Representation and Multiparty Politics:

1. Divide class into six groups.
2. Duplicate and distribute political party cards to students.
3. Allow time for groups to become familiar with their political party by creating a party slogan that emphasizes the goals identified in their party's platform and their party's ideology.
4. Ask each group to select a spokesperson ("party leader") to explain to the rest of the class what their party "stands for."
5. Announce the results of the election.
6. Explain to students that to obtain a majority (and thus be able to pass legislation) in the lower house, some groups will have to form a "governing coalition" with other groups through compromising. Allow time for students to review the party ideologies, so they know which parties to approach. Party leaders will enter into negotiations with parties with which they have some basis for agreement (i.e., parties that are in favor of a free market economy or are pro-European Union might be able to form a coalition, even if they disagree on other issues).
7. Once coalitions are formed the teacher should introduce some ideas for new legislation, and students could discuss how their party might vote on that legislation.
8. To close the activity, discuss with students the advantages and disadvantages of proportional representation and a multiparty system.

To expand the simulation to demonstrate how a parliamentary system works:

1. The governing coalition will choose a prime minister and a cabinet (forming a "government"). All of these positions must be filled by delegates from the parties that make up the governing coalition. This demonstrates the fusion between the executive and legislative branches because the "government" is made up of people who retain their seats in Parliament.
2. The new government will introduce bills. Parties will debate the bills and decide how they would vote. Typically voting will be along party/coalition lines. If the government cannot get enough votes to pass its legislation, it is because there are major disagreements within the coalition. In this situation, there's a good chance the coalition will break down and force new elections.
3. The parliament could elect a president—the head of state—to demonstrate that the president is not directly elected and plays a different role than our president.
4. Discuss the advantages and disadvantages of a parliamentary system of government.

CZECH REPUBLIC: POLITICAL PARTIES

1. Czech Social Democratic Party

The CSSD is the only pre-communist social democratic party in Central and Eastern Europe that has successfully reconstituted itself. It was founded in 1878 and is the oldest of the existing Czech parties.

The CSSD favors a “social market economy” (free market capitalism combined with a strong safety net of social services). But it has also promoted accelerating the privatization process, especially among Czech banks. It promotes foreign investment. The party is very pro-European (pro-European Union).

People who vote for this party are mainly working-class voters in industrial towns, also public service employees, and trade union members. However, its support fluctuates from election to election.

2. Civic Democratic Party (Obcanska Demokraticka Strana -ODS)

The ODS has existed for 11 years. Its short history has been dominated by the party’s charismatic leader, Vaclav Klaus, an economist who thoroughly embraces the free market.

The ODS is a center-right conservative party. It wants to create a free market economy without major government intervention, with low taxes, and a smaller government bureaucracy. Its election campaign has included a 15% set income tax rate. It also wants strong ties with Western Europe, especially with NATO and the European Union.

This party appeals strongly to the middle class and to entrepreneurs, and also has considerable support in the larger cities. It is popular among younger voters and particularly among women.

3. Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (Komunisticka Stana Cech a Moravy-KSCM)

The KSCM is a successor of the former Communist Party of Czechoslovakia founded in 1921. It is proud of its history and is an orthodox communist party, believing in strong state control of the economy. The party’s political platform calls for “an appropriate degree of state ownership in key sectors of the economy (banking, transport, telecommunications, energy, etc.)” The KSCM is strongly opposed to Czech NATO membership and to the European Union. Most mainstream labor union leaders distance themselves from the party. Other parties currently represented in parliament refuse to work together with the KSCM, unless it undergoes major reforms.

Many older people who have found it hard to adapt to the new conditions vote for this party. The KSCM also gets support in industrial areas with high unemployment.

4. Christian Democratic Union /Czechoslovak People’s Party (Krestanska a Demokraticka Unie/ Ceskoslovenska Strana Lidova)

The CSL was formed in 1918 as a conservative, mainly Catholic party. Under the communist regime, it lost its independence and existed in name only. To distance itself from the communist past, it changed its name to KDU/CSL.

The KDU/CSL is a traditional, conservative, Roman Catholic-based party. It defines itself as right of center. The party is strongly pro-European Union and also strongly in favor of direct presidential elections. On some social issues, such as the questioning of legalizing homosexual partnerships, it is conservative, consistent with its Catholic tradition. But on other issues, such as providing a social safety net, it is closer to the Social Democrats. The KDU/CSL’s party platform also has a strong focus on the battle against corruption and on the rule of law.

People who vote for this party are Catholics and conservatives in small towns and rural areas.

5. The Freedom Union/Democratic Union
(Unie Svobody)

The US was formed in 1998 by disenchanted members of parliament who broke away from Vaclav Klaus's Civic Democratic Party. It joined in 2001 with a small right-of-center party, the DEU.

The US/DEU is a right-of-center party, committed to free market capitalism. It combines classic right-wing policies, such as tax reductions and the introduction of tuition fees for university students, with a stress on the environment and on minority rights. Another theme of the party is the battle against economic and political corruption. The party is strongly pro-European Union. It is also strongly in favor of constitutional changes that would allow the Czech president to be directly elected.

The US/DEU is popular among people with higher education and particularly appeals to young people and to those disillusioned with the larger parties. Its support is mainly in urban areas.

6. The Green Party
(Strana Zelenych)

This party is strongly opposed to nuclear power, which is one of its key issues. Its platform also calls for policies to "reduce the rate of divorce, abortion, and other undesirable phenomena."

7. Republicans of Miroslav Sladek

This is a far right-wing party, appealing to nationalist sympathies. It emerged from the ashes of the former Republican Party in an attempt at a political comeback by its controversial leaders. The party is extremist with vehement anti-Romany (gypsy) and anti-German rhetoric. It is anti-NATO, anti EU, and strongly opposed to immigration.