

Polity IV Country Report 2007: Czech Republic

<table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="width: 15%;">Score:</td> <td style="width: 15%;">2006</td> <td style="width: 15%;">2007</td> <td style="width: 15%;">Change</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Polity:</td> <td>8</td> <td>8</td> <td>0</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Democ:</td> <td>8</td> <td>8</td> <td>0</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Autoc:</td> <td>0</td> <td>0</td> <td>0</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Durable:</td> <td></td> <td>14</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Tentative:</td> <td></td> <td>Yes</td> <td></td> </tr> </table>	Score:	2006	2007	Change	Polity:	8	8	0	Democ:	8	8	0	Autoc:	0	0	0	Durable:		14		Tentative:		Yes		
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SCODE	CZR	CCODE	316	Date of Report	1 November 2008																				
Polity IV Component Variables																									
XRREG	XRCOMP	XROPEN	XCONST	PARREG	PARCOMP																				
3	3	4	7	2	3																				
Date of Most Recent Polity Transition (3 or more point change)																									
End Date	31 December 1992 (Dis.)		Begin Date	1 January 1993 (Ind.)																					
Polity Fragmentation: No																									
Constitution	1992																								
Executive(s)	President Vaclav Klaus (ODS); initially elected by Parliament in 2003; reelected, 15 February 2008																								
Legislature	<p>Bicameral: Chamber of Deputies (200 seats; proportionally elected; most recent elections, 2-3 June 2006) Civic Democratic Party (ODS): 81 Czech Social Democratic Party (CSSD): 74 Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (KSCM): 26 Christian and Democratic Union-Czechoslovak People's Party (KDU-CSL): 13 Green Party (SZ): 6</p> <p>Senate (81 seats; directly elected; most recent elections, 17-18 and 24-25 October 2008 [partial]) <i>[actual composition after October 2008 elections]:</i> ODS: 35 CSSD: 29 KDU-CSL: 7 Other parties: 9 Non-partisans: 1</p>																								
Judiciary	Supreme Court; Constitutional Court																								

Narrative Description:¹

Executive Recruitment: Competitive Elections (8)

The constituent republics of Czechoslovakia agreed to split at the end of 1992, forming two separate entities: Slovakia and the Czech Republic. The Czech Republic's constitution of 1992 reflects the Western liberal tradition of political thought and incorporates the principles of the Charter of Fundamental Rights and Freedoms in proclaiming a multiparty democratic republic. Executive power is nominally vested in the president, who is head of state and is elected by a joint session of the Parliament to a five-year term. The president appoints the prime-minister who heads the government and advises the president on the appointment of other members of the government. While the president has very little direct control over policy formation or implementation, nonetheless, s/he can exert significant power through the selection of the country's highest judges as well as the chief of the Czech central bank. President Vaclav Havel, having previously served as President of Czechoslovakia, served continually from the new republic's inception until the presidential elections of early 2003. Former center-right Prime Minister Vaclav Klaus was narrowly elected president in National Assembly balloting in February 2003. Klaus was re-elected to the office of president in February 2008 in a close contest that was reportedly marred by threats, bribes and corruption. After two elections and six rounds of voting, in which a number of lawmakers were targeted by threats and blackmail, Klaus emerged victorious with 141 of the 280 ballots in the National Assembly. Klaus, a member of the Civic Democratic Party (ODS), defeated Jan Svejnar of the Social Democratic Party (CSSD).

The Prime Minister holds considerable power in the Czech system of governance. The Prime Minister's powers include the right to set the agenda for most foreign and domestic policy and the ability to choose governmental ministers. Following the June 2002 legislative elections, the CSSD ended its uneasy alliance with the ODS to form a single-seat majority government with the Coalition (KDU-CSL/US-DEU). In June 2004 Prime Minister Vladimir Spidla, leader of the CSSD, stood down as party leader and announced that he and his Cabinet would resign. President Klaus called on the new acting CSSD leader, Deputy Prime Minister and Interior Minister Stanislav Gross, to form the next government, which was formally accepted on 26 July 2004. Amid allegations of financial impropriety, in April 2005 Prime Minister Gross resigned after coalition partners agreed to form a new government headed by Social Democrat Jiri Paroubek. After the electoral victory of Civic Democratic Party (ODS) in June 2006, Mirek Topolanek became prime minister. Both Prime Minister Topolanek and President Klaus are members of the ODS.

Executive Constraints: Executive Parity or Subordination (7)

Despite over forty years of communist one-party rule in the post-WWII era, Czech politics maintained a legacy of political bargaining and party mobilization. Along with neighboring Hungary and Poland, Czechoslovakia was at the forefront of the liberalization movement that transformed East European politics. The transition to open, competitive politics was fairly quick and smooth, despite the political disagreements that led to the "Velvet Revolution" and the dissolution of Czechoslovakia. There are two main parties and several smaller parties vying for influence in the Czech parliament. The parliamentary structure of Czech politics, along with the parity of political power held by the two main parties, ensures that the prime minister will be subjected to a high degree of horizontal accountability. For example, in the aftermath of the June 2006 parliamentary elections, in which coalition blocks from the left (the Social Democratic Party and the Communist Party) and the center-right (Civic Democratic Party, the Christian Democrats and the Green Party) evenly divided the lower house at 100 seats apiece, parliament became deadlocked and the capacity of Prime Minister Topolanek to govern was severely hampered. After one failed attempt at establishing a governing coalition in 2006, in January 2007 Prime Minister Topolanek was finally able to win a narrow vote of confidence in the legislature and was permitted to form a center-right administration. The judiciary, for its part, is independent and effective while the military has assumed a non-political role.

¹ The research described in this report was sponsored by the Political Instability Task Force (PITF). The PITF is funded by the Central Intelligence Agency. The views expressed herein are the authors' alone and do not represent the views of the US Government.

Political Participation: Factional Competition (7)

Political competition in the Czech Republic has increasingly exhibited characteristics of political factionalism. In the aftermath of the June 2006 parliamentary elections, which produced a parliamentary deadlock between the Civic Democrat-led coalition (100 seats) and the Social Democrat-led coalition (100 seats), the political atmosphere in this country has become increasingly fractious in nature. While the Social Democratic Party (CSSD) wants to preserve the existing social welfare state established under communist rule, the Civic Democrats (ODS) want to scale back the welfare state and impose a flat-rate income tax. While both of these coalitions are deeply divided internally, nonetheless, the balance of power between the two coalition groups has made it increasingly difficult to form a functioning government. Thirty days after being sworn into office, the leader of the center-right ODS, Prime Minister Mirek Topolánek, was reduced to running a single-party minority government after losing a vote of confidence in October 2006. Under the terms of the Czech constitution, the outgoing government of Prime Minister Topolánek was required to make three attempts at forming a new government before calling new elections. While President Vaclav Klaus (who is also a member of the Prime Minister's Civic Democrat party) has publicly favored a ODS-CSSD "grand coalition," the Prime Minister remained steadfastly opposed to this idea. In January 2007, Prime Minister Topolánek formed a new conservative-right government after he squeaked through by on a vote of confidence in the National Assembly due to the "absence" of to renegade Social Democrat deputies. However, these two Social Democrat deputies publicly stated that they would not back the ruling coalition in future legislative debates, thus ensuring the continuation of parliamentary deadlock. While the ODS could call early elections to break this deadlock, Prime Minister Topolánek has resisted this temptation due to his shaky position within the party. The Prime Minister fears that an election could give his powerful rivals within his party – who are backed by President Klaus – a chance to strike and remove him from power. Vaclav Klaus had been the leader of ODS until he decided to run for president in 2002 and was subsequently replaced by Mirek Topolánek.