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“Hard Left” and “Soft Left” Antagonism? The Transformation of the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia and its Relations to the Social Democrats

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The Communist party of Bohemia and Moravia (KSČM) has developed into a political party which enjoys considerable influence and has been well rooted in the society. Mere election arithmetic prove that a broader recognition and acceptance of KSČM and its "reconciliation" with the Czech Social Democratic Party (ČSSD) could have profoundly changed the party-political constellation in the Czech republic after 1989. Until now, however, the coalition potential of KSČM has remained limited on national level. The paper argues that one of reasons for it is the ambiguous image of the KSČM. While a programmatic shift towards ČSSD is hard to be disputed, the party's aim of a revolutionary, systemic change has been largely interpreted as an anti-systemic and therefore negativist or even anti-democratic orientation. Also, its revolutionary rhetoric notwithstanding, the majority stream in the party seems to come closer to the conservative-liberal Civic Democratic Party (ODS) than to ČSSD in strategic issues such as European integration or the attitude toward Germany.

In terms of relations between KSČM and the social democracy, pragmatic approaches have enabled and motivated mutual practical co-operation on number of issues, limited, however, to the local and regional level and the Czech Parliament. Indeed, in order to explain the limitation, both parties need to be analysed. This text, however, narrows the focus just on KSČM. We argue here two factors have prevented a full-scale co-operation of the "hard" and "soft left" on the national level so far. On the one hand, it has been hampered by the communist ("Leninist") identity and negativist image of KSČM. On the other, political and ideological differences as well as competition between KSČM and ČSSD has played a negative role. Neither of the two above mentioned factors hamper KSČM to play the role of a party of radical political protest or, vice versa, to utilise pragmatically its power and influence in co-operating with the Czech left and right. However, both have effectively deterred potential partners within the non-communist left from going for an unlimited joint engagement with KSČM on national level as yet.

1. Transformation of the Czech Communist party

As in the other communist successor parties (CSPs), the window of opportunity for change of the Czech Communist party was open mainly in the early 1990s. In an atmosphere of emphatic popular rejection of the communist party, its leadership had to make contingent political choices (Hanley, 2001), which pushed it into a defensive position. It implemented a programmatic change, which represented a radical departure from the pre-1989 doctrine. The party gave up its constitutional claim to the "leading role" in society, Marxism-Leninism as a state ideology, committed itself to parliamentary democracy, political pluralism and the existence of various forms of ownership of means of production. It deleted the "class struggle" axiom from its programme, stopped mentioning the fight against the imperialism, nationalisation, in its official documents. In struggle against the old apparatus and in seeking democratic renewal, the party decentralised its organisational structure and temporarily suppressed the organisational principle of democratic centralism. The radical decentralisation greatly enhanced the role of the district party organisation and of the grass roots. The shift proved to be of crucial importance: those, who promoted fast track transformation of the party, left dissatisfied with its slow pace. The party thus lost most of its young and mid-age members. KSČM, which has always put forward "experienced" and therefore elderly "cadres" became dominated by members-pensioners. Thus by definition, majority of the party has been composed of people, who actively implemented or at least agreed to the "normalisation" of the party after the "Prague Spring" of 1968. A "communist Counter-Reformation" of a sort, the so-called "normalisation" has thoroughly cleansed the party of its reform potential and reinstalled the most dogmatic version of the Marxist-Leninist ideology during the 1970s. The same party members followed the "perestroika" and "glasnost" in the USSR with suspicion

and opposed radical changes in the party and the society in late 1980s. Currently, they represent the majority of the traditionalist and conservative element in the KSČM. Heller therefore describes KSČM not as a working-class-party, but as a party of the lower strata of the former ruling class (Heller, 2003, 28). Given the decentralisation and internal democratisation of the party, the local and grass-root organisations shaped the party in a bottom-up process during early 1990s.

The sheer size of the KSČM traditionalist and conservative membership base and of the permanent constituency secured a convenient electoral support of 10% and more. The existence of the party was therefore secured even without much change – an option, which most of the other former communist parties did not have. There was therefore only a limited support for party leaders like Vasil Mohorita (1990), followed by Jiří Svoboda (1990-1993), who sought more or less openly and consistently a non-communist modernisation of the party in order to attract broader left circles. Soon, internal discussion on the past and on the future programme of the party focused on the party's name. The debate culminated in an internal referendum on this issue (Fiala et al, 1999, pp.183-206). The Prostějov party congress in 1993 concluded the initial search for an adequate survival strategy and focused on preservation of the party's mass membership base. KSČM in fact opted for what has been termed by Ishiyama and Bozóki a "strategy of leftist retreat" (2001, 34) or simply "orthodox communist strategy" (2001, 40). However, we do not see the KSČM strategy as absolutely coherent as it allows for certain input of other than just conservative forces – primarily of neo-communists. On the other hand we do not fully agree with Haley's assertion that the party adopted a "neo-communist strategy" even if we do see "innovative and democratic elements" in the party's development (2001, 97). We want to argue here that the case of the KSČM transformation is not as clearly cut. We will use the term "leftist-retreat strategy" but understand it not as an exclusively conservative orthodox construct. We perceive the KSČM survival strategy as reflecting the current modus vivendi between the individual streams within the party.

We agree with the common view, presented in the literature, that the party gradually divided into what has been called the "non-communist" (social-democratic), "conservative" (dogmatic Marxist-Leninist) and modernising "neo-communist" streams in early 1990s. However, we argue that a fourth stream has to be taken into account as an element of its own: the traditionalists representing the majority of the party. Admittedly, the traditionalist stream is less articulate than the other ones: being a rather heterogeneous group, the traditionalists cling to familiar symbols and customary ideational construct of Marxist-Leninism rather than work on their own theoretical concepts. Being closer to the conservatives in ideational issues, they have often been ready to support pragmatic solutions.

Not surprisingly, the most influential force of the "strategy of leftist retreat" has been a tentative "retreat coalition" consisting of the conservative and traditionalist streams. The core of the strategy has been shaped by the will of the party's distressed membership as yet, which sought not modernisation and exposure to critical discourse and changes. Overwhelming interest has been rather preservation of a confidential, familiar ideological and social sanctuary amid the turbulent and often controversial transformation of the society. The strategy has been, however, as open to adjustment as any modus vivendi. KSČM has never stopped discussing and indeed adopting changes to its strategy and these discussions have been accelerated by the recent growth of party's position and by preparation for the crucial 6th Congress.

The party leadership elected in 1993 has been headed by Miroslav Grebeníček, who has represented the "retreat coalition" in many ways, but has adopted mostly centrist position on programmatic issues. Under his leadership, the party has restored its unity by the process of a

certain “re-Bolshevisation”. Elements of democratic centralism have been reintroduced and the centre sought to obtain and consolidate leading role in the party. KSČM has gradually enhanced its standing on the political scene.

The co-operation of the three streams within the party has been built on preservation of the party’s communist “vanguard” identity and elements of its traditional ideology, the familiar language, the party’s symbols (most crucially its name). The majority of the party has maintained its assessment of the “friends” (radical left and the “socialist” states) as well as the “foes”. A strong inclination towards an anti-German, anti-American and anti-clerical stance has often resulted in an underlying tendency towards the rejection of the “capitalist West” as a whole.

KSČM has introduced essential programmatic positions of the western left – non-communist as well as Euro-communist – which the party had equally emphatically rejected both before 1989. Nonetheless, KSČM seeks to implement “a concept of vanguard party” (Zprava, 5th Congress, 1999, 31) and perceives itself as the only genuine Czech left party. Its long-term objective is a “systemic change”: the transformation from capitalism to socialism (Zprava, 5th Congress, 1999, pp.25, 27 & 31). The neo-communist modernisers have been the only group, which has continued to elaborate on a “modern left party” concept. Programmatic emphasis on points, such as “self-government”, “intermediation” in the society and “new rationality” are reaching beyond the rather pragmatic programmatic orientation of the party (Ransdorf, 2001). The more visible the deviation of the neo-communist modernisers from the traditional postulates, the bigger their distance from the conservatives as well as the traditionalists. M. Grebeníček has checked periodical strengthening of the unacceptable orthodox positions of the conservatives until recently. Preparation for the 6th Congress indicates that the representatives of all streams will try to redefine the *modus vivendi* in their favour.

One of the results of the ideational heterogeneity of the party has been an increasing degree of pragmatism. KSČM focused on maximisation of its power and influence, which the party and its leaders may enjoy on different level of policy-making. The electoral success of the party in 2002 (the party gained 18,5% votes) has strengthened this attitude. In an unprecedented move, the party supported its ideological rival and the spirit of the capitalist *liases affair* transformation, Václav Klaus, the former Chairman of the ODS, in his bid for President in March 2003. In the Parliament, KSČM has sided more frequently with the ODS against the centre-left coalition, headed by the Social Democrats. In the Senate, the upper house of the Czech Parliament, the communists established a club together with a dubious tycoon and media magnate Železný, a nation-wide symbol of non-transparent business if not theft on huge scale.

The party’s electoral success certainly proved that the survival strategy has worked until now.¹ While the ratio between the party members and non-members in the electorate of KSČM was 1:2,5% in 1990, it shifted to 1:7 in 2002. (Vacek, 2002, 9). It is, however, questionable, whether the party attracted new and permanent constituency. More likely, KSČM attracted the “protest-voters” and those, who wanted to punish the ČSSD for its performance as the governing party. The ageing KSČM has approached the limits of its

¹ The party gained 13.25% of votes in 1990, 14.5% in 1992 (election coalition Left Block composed of the KSČM, the LB and DL), 10.33% in 1996, 11.03% in 1998 and 18.5% in 2002. The party achieved traditionally good results during regional elections. In 1999, KSČM participated in nine coalitions with the ČSSD, SDS and KDU-ČSL at the municipal level. The radical increase of the electoral success of the party came early in the new century. The electorate of the KSČM has increased considerably.

growth as long as it does not reach out towards the young, well-educated urban population – something, which has been discussed with growing emphasis.²

Opinions regarding the future strategy of the party are deeply divided. They reflect the fact that the party does not represent a coherent single. The traditional conviction is that KSČM should be able to use better its “main asset” - “the largest and most experienced” membership base. (Matulka, 2002, 16) Another view defines KSČM as a “political formation translating between groups, layers and classes in the society”. KSČM should be the “translator, interpreter”.³ The party, it is said, has to move away from its narrowly defined class-orientation and must become more open towards diverse social strata (Ransdorf, 2001, 45-47).

2. KSČM and its relations vis-à-vis “Hard” and “Soft Left”

In December 1989, Ladislav Adamec, the Chairman of the party, referred to the experience of the social-democratic parties (*Závěrečné slovo L.Adamce*, 1989). Most significantly, however, the leadership of Vasil Mohorita (1990) and Jiří Svoboda (1990-1993) were in principle ready to make extensive use of the programmatic know-how of the social-democratic parties. They sought a non-communist path of transformation of the party and recognition in the western non-communist left. “If there had been an offer, we would have been able to pull the party towards social democratic development and associate membership of the SI”.⁴

Even then, the contacts with the social democracy, however, could not be established. The immediate reason was that the Socialist International and its member parties focused on the rebirth of the Czechoslovak Social Democracy (ČSSD). The KSČ, one of the most dogmatic communist parties of the Soviet block, was neither attractive nor was it trusted immediately after 1989. When ČSSD won the elections in 1998 and in 2002, the representatives of the KSČM anticipated that KSČM would be invited either to join the government or to support the a ČSSD minority government. Such expectations were not met. Formally, the reason is the resolution of the Congress of the ČSSD from Bohumín, held in 1995. The resolution rejected any significant political co-operation with Communists on national level. There are a number of reasons for the limitation on the side of the ČSSD. In this article we look, however, at a set of reasons, which may explain why KSČM has not become a partner of the ČSSD (and, for that matter, the Socialist International) for more intensive co-operation as yet.

2.1. Preferences for the “Hard Left”

Firstly, while the Social Democrats turned to their sister parties, the KSČM showed clear *preference for the “hard left”* since 1993 at the latest. Given the rejection of the party by majority of the society, KSČM tended to view itself as being “in a fortress under siege”, especially in the early 1990s.⁵ The orientation of the individual representatives and ideational

² In 1992 the Czech Communist party had 354 549 members in 10 669 grass-root organisations. The figures decreased down to 136 516 members in 5 406 grass root organisation by 1999. During 1990-1998, 3629 new members entered the party. 67,3% party members are pensioners, 64% have only the elementary education. However, the 8,7% graduates of universities in the party and 17,1% members younger than 50 years represent in absolute numbers more members than is the total membership of any other party in the Czech Republic (*Zpráva 5th Congress, 1999, pp.52-54*).

³ M.Ransdorf, 6.1.2003

⁴ R.Valenčík, 29.1.2003

⁵ J.Heller, 6.1.2003

streams within the party reflect the internal differentiation of the party. The conservatives as well as the neo-communists have developed their own foreign contacts, linking directly with partners with corresponding ideological preferences.

The truth is that even relations with the radical left have developed only gradually. Not only the SI and its member parties, foreign communist parties and CSPs did not turn actively to KSČM throughout most of 1990s either. The most important exception was the co-operation with the PDS. However, since 2001, the foreign contacts of KSČM have been growing. The "anti-NATO-summit" conference (Prague, 19th November 2002) opened the possibility that KSČM could play the role of a co-ordinator of the "hard left" in Europe.

The lack of contacts with the non-communist left notwithstanding, KSČM has studied documents of the SI and of the group of radical European left parties in the EP. These programmes, however, are viewed as only rarely giving specific answers to the most burning questions.⁶ Nonetheless, KSČM has emphasised time and again that there is an overlap between 70% of its programme and the programme of ČSSD.

2.2. Institutional Constraints

Secondly, there persist certain institutional limitations. Generally, neither the leadership nor the political apparatus of the party have been adequately qualified for the scope of problems it had to deal with (Grzymala-Busse, 2002, 83-89). This is true also for relations of KSČM vis-à-vis other left parties, notably abroad. There are clearly exception to this rule, such as the two Deputy Chairmen of the party, Miloslav Ransdorf and Jiří Dolejš. However, most of the other leaders of the party had little experience with intensive international contacts other than with the Soviet Communists and their allies before 1989. The limitations concern most crucially lacking language skills. The new leaders were not established on the international stage and therefore lacked credibility abroad. Also, the capacity and international competence of the party staff has been limited. The present foreign relations department of the KSČM's Central Committee is primarily a service department. The Central Committee established the Theoretical-Analytical Unit (TAP) and a well-developed structure of so-called "expert working groups".⁷ Both deliver an extensive volume of analysis. Nonetheless, even their capacity has been critically viewed as limited (Matulka, 2002, 16).⁸

2.3. Ideological Limitations

Thirdly and more importantly, there are *ideological limitations*. They have crucially shaped the above-discussed preferences of the party's external relations. Similarly, the ideological issues have, however, greatly influenced the attitude of non-communist parties, organisations and movements to KSČM itself. The society has appreciated the internal ideological heterogeneity and the "temperate neo-communist modernisation" of KSČM only marginally.

⁶ J.Dolejš, 7.1.2003

⁷ The groups are usually linked with grass-root party organisations. More importantly, many of them established so called clubs (for example the "Club of Economists"), which are opened to interested public and non-communists. In some cases, as in the case of the Club of Sociologists and Psychologists, the clubs have developed into broader discussion, which is not confined by the framework of the party.

⁸ Obviously enough, they are limited by the high average age of their members, by the fact that their education and professional life had been largely completed under the communist regime, and by the limited knowledge of foreign languages.

The image of the party has been dominated by the tentative "retreat coalition" of the conservatives and the traditionalist majority.

The party has been widely perceived as "non-reformed". The communist name has played the role of a sign post of the party. The label "communist" has, however, lost the attractiveness it had enjoyed during 1920s, shortly after the World War Two, or during the "Prague Spring" of 1968. At these times, the communist name was widely associated with modern and progressive trends in politics and culture. Preserving the name after 1989 has served the consolidation on the conservative-traditionalist basis, which had dominated the party after the crushing of the reformist elements during the 1970-1980s.

The language of the party consists to a large extent of a shortcut of Marxist-Leninist phraseology mixed with engraved idiomatic anti-German, anti-American and generally anti-Western word associations. The result is a rather coherent word corpus, a "class/Slavic-speak" of a sort. Such a "lingua franca" of KSČM has had two roles. Firstly, like the communist name of the party, it has integrated the party by bridging (at least formally) the existing differences and enhancing the fellow feeling among the party members and with their representatives.

Secondly, it has distinguished the party from the non-communist majority of the society. Based on the conventional ideological and bureaucratic language, which had been imposed on the society by the party before 1989, it is intimately familiar to the contemporaries. While turning to non-communists, the party members and representatives use therefore a much more neutral language in order to avoid outright rejection. Nevertheless, the "class/Slavic-speak" dominates *Halo noviny* and most of the other publications of the party making them to look like a relict of the pre-1989 era.

More generally, there is a great deal of *ideological competition* between KSČM and the Czech social democrats. The background of the competition is a search for adequate programmatic attitude to the social and economic processes in the era of globalisation, to international relations in the post-cold war world. Also, KSČM and ČSSD share parts of their electorate. The competition of the parties has been therefore of crucial importance for their election performance. So, the concept of "democratic socialism", which the SI has elaborated on throughout the 1980s and which ČSSD emulated, influenced the communist party programme in early 1990s.⁹ While the KSČM programmes in 1990-1991 included the concept of "democratic socialism"; the latter disappeared from the programmes later. In its first official programmatic document (adopted during the 1st Congress, October 1990), KSČM referred directly to the Declaration of Principles of the SI of 1989. KSČM emphasised that it shared the values, including social justice and solidarity, of the SI (Program, 1st Congress, 1990, 17). Democratic socialism was presented as an economically efficient and socially just principle of society, with a democratic system of administration, in which every citizen would have equal opportunity to develop his or her individual personality and abilities (Teze ekonomického, 1990, 31). However, the third programme (Program, 3rd Congress, 1993) speaks about "modern socialist society" instead of "democratic socialism" already. The most recent 5th congress (1999) elaborates on "socialism", "modern socialism" and "real socialism" (Zpráva, 5th Congress, 1999). "Modern socialism" in fact does not differ much from "democratic socialism" in content, but KSČM sought to distinguish itself clearly from the SI programmatic.¹⁰

⁹ J.Dolejš, 7.1.2003

¹⁰ Z.Hába, 12.2.2003

Similarly, KSČM has never arrived at an agreed attitude towards the "welfare state", a core element in the programmatic concept of the ČSSD. While a section of KSČM, including some of its experts, has perceived the "welfare state" as a construct designed to smooth class differences, others have argued that the social state, a minimum social commitment by the capitalist state, has to be defended against globalisation. It has been argued the party has to "force the ČSSD to defend its welfare state concept at least in a minimalist form" (Dolejš, 2002, 28). In fact, KSČM programme integrated the pillar principles of "welfare state", avoiding mentioning the term itself. The programme elaborates instead on a "socially just society". The reason the term "welfare state" has not been used is similar to that behind the exclusion of "democratic socialism" from the programme: for political and ideological reasons, the party sought a distance from social democratic parties and the SI.¹¹ Also, KSČM has sought a distinctive concept, which would differ from the "social market economy". The 3rd Congress therefore introduced the concept of a "socialist market economy", describing it as a system able to establish equality of opportunity for all based on the principle of social justice (Program, 3rd Congress, 1993, 52).

Beyond the ideological competition, the *internal ideological differentiation* of KSČM may be viewed as a problem of its own. It is not obvious, which stream of the party is going to have the decisive influence or how the compromise among the streams will be struck. Indeed, the present ideational compromise within KSČM seems to be rather ambiguous. So, the "class struggle" was removed from the programme. It has been, however, further deeply rooted in the thinking of the party. Heller views the "class struggle" as omnipresent and inevitable as long as different social classes continue to exist (Heller, 2003, 36). The political lexicon published on the web site of the Central Committee and composed by its Theoretical and Analytical Unit goes one step further. Defining the class struggle as "the driving force of the history", it perceives the "dictatorship of proletariat" as the inevitable outcome of it. The dictatorship represents the "highest form of democracy" because it "enables that the majority of the society to arrive - by the means of the class struggle - at its universal self-development" (Slovníček, 2003).¹²

The question of ideological differences between the social democratic and communist programme in general can not be answered easily. Some KSČM representatives argue that the main difference lies not in form but rather "in the practical implementation of the programmes."¹³ Others see the concept of self-governance, introduced into the communist programme in early 1990s, distinguishing the communist and social-democratic programmes.¹⁴ Yet another view emphasises rather the perception that the programme of the KSČM has developed in the opposite direction from the programme of the ČSSD. According to this view, KSČM has been "returning to socialism today." Also, it is the method, "the scientific substance of our attitude" that is perceived to be the main difference between KSČM and social-democratic parties - "long-term orientation and programmatic persistence." All other left parties behave simply pragmatically.¹⁵ Yet another point of view sees the major

¹¹ Z.Hába, 12.2.2003

¹² The latter is viewed as an inevitable result of the class struggle and represents the "highest form of democracy" because it "enables that the majority of the society to arrive - by the means of the class struggle - to its universal self-development" (Slovníček, 2003)

¹³ J.Kohlíček, 17.1.2003

¹⁴ J.Heller, 6.1.2003

¹⁵ V.Exner, 7.1.2003

point of differentiation in the Marxist attitude to the ownership of production means. KSČM seeks such a structure of ownership in which some 75-80% of production means lie not in private hands but in different forms of collective ownership, such as the Employee Share Ownership Programme (ESOP).¹⁶

2.4. The Evaluation of History

Fourthly, the *evaluation of history* and of the history of the communist movement in particular has remained a divisive issue both within the party as well as in its relations vis-à-vis non-communist actors. Three positions have developed since 1993. The assessment of the period before 1989 by neo-communists has been critical and represented a platform on which the neo-communist and non-communist debate about the Czechoslovak history could be developed. (Ransdorf, 2001; Heller, 2003). Even the neo-communists, however, did not produce any standard historical analysis of the party's past. Such would have to seek new interpretation of the most controversial issues - such as the "Bolshevisation" of the party in 1920s, its negativist attitude to the Czechoslovak state until mid 1930s. The gradual "Stalinisation" of the party and of the society Czechoslovakia and the role of individual party leaders and structures, Klement Gottwald in particular, in these processes wait for reassessment. The "Prague spring 1968" and mechanisms of power during the "normalisation" period and the attitude to the "velvet revolution" of 1989 found no solid analysis, split the party and create a gap between the party and most of the Czech society.

The second, conservative attitude, as presented mostly in the party's daily *Halo noviny* and by the club of historians by the Central Committee, has been largely based on rejection of any serious reassessment of the past at all (Frajdl, 2003). As a result, the "retreat coalition" has preserved the canon of historical awareness largely unchanged.

The third position represents a compromise between the neo-communist reassessment and the conservative canonisation of the communist history. It is presented in the official document of the Theoretical and Analytical Unit (Informace, 2003). The document offers an often-critical view of the communist policy during 1948-1989. At the same time, it often slips into the traditional habit of blaming the flaws of the communist rule on external conditions. Also, it avoids analysis of fundamental questions regarding the impact of the then "socialist" concept on the economic and social structure of the society, on the civic society milieu, on moral standards of the society and its political culture, on the "social capital" of the country and alike.

The attitude to the historical issues has had direct political implications for the relations with the ČSSD. The "retreat coalition" has treated the party's past as one of the main positive source of its identity and as a pillar of the party's unity. Therefore, it has never diverted from the traditional dictum of the history. Unlike the PDS, the KSČM has for example never expressed regret regarding the forced merger of the ČSSD with the KSČ in 1948. Also, there have been only a few lawsuits against former party and state officials charged with crimes or unlawful action back from the time before 1989. The courts mostly released the defendants for formal reasons, high age, lack of evidence or due to the amnesty by President Havel.¹⁷ The moral and political responsibility of the individuals has, however, rarely been in doubt.

¹⁶ Z.Hába, 12.2.2003

¹⁷ The media expectedly discussed broadly the case of Alois Grebeníček, the father of the party's Chairman, who managed to avoid the court proceedings for several years and never even regretted the role he had played as a warder of the state police prison in early 1950s.

Instead of keeping at least at distance from the cases, KSČM has (mostly through its *Halo noviny*) always denounced the cases as political trials, clearly presented its warmest sympathy with the defendants, and often offered them assistance. With similar effect, the party reintegrated some key public figures of the former regime during 1990s.¹⁸

The party has issued an apology for the crimes as early as in 1989. The actual attitude of the party, however, degraded the apology to a hollow and formal gesture. The party has shown little readiness to a serious critical reassessment of its history. It has not contributed to the difficult process of coming to the terms with the past, which the Czech society has been slowly going through. On the one hand, the party claimed broad recognition for the positive achievements of the previous regime and for the honest and self-sacrificing work of many of its members. At the same time, it hampered any such recognition by its rigid attitude to the past and by the total lack of real empathy vis-à-vis the victims of the former regime.

The attitude to the former communist regime has been the most important element of the "regime divide". As Kitschelt and others argued, the latter played a decisive role in mid 1990s and impacted on internal development of Czech political parties and on inter-party co-operation. It effectively prevented coalition building between KSČM and ČSSD during the 1990s (Kitschelt, Mansfeldová, Markowski, Tóka, 1999, 375). After ČSSD came into office, the "regime divide", however, proved to be irrelevant for the party's role as an entity of political protest of the disappointed left-wing electorate. Also, the "rehabilitation" of KSČM as a "normal" political party by the liberal-conservative Civic Democratic Party (ODS - the party of the current President Václav Klaus) in 2002-2003 seems to have broken a taboo in the attitude of the socially distressed public. It has made support for KSČM a "politically correct" stance. Thus both ČSSD and ODS have "helped" the KSČM to become the second strongest party with the support up to 23,4%, thus outrunning the ČSSD (16,6%) (Macháček, 2003).

2.5. Political Constraints

Fifthly, there are substantial *political limitations*. KSČM and ČSSD, standing next to each other on the scale between market liberalism and social protection, engaged often into a *zero-sum game*: the loss of one party has usually translated into gains for the other.¹⁹

Both parties chose *different political strategies*. KSČM was ignored, isolated and placed under considerable pressure by anti-Communist rhetoric (partly also practice) both at home and on the international scene in early 1990s. On its turn, however, KSČM's political strategy ("strategy of leftist retreat") contributed greatly to its isolation. The party has done little to nothing to seek support beyond its loyal (largely communist) constituency since 1993. The party's Chairman, Miroslav Grebeníček, has been usually viewed as the impersonation of the old-type bureaucratic communist cadre and has always been at the bottom in the public opinion polls. The traditional conviction that the social democracy was in fact merely a servant of capitalism has been frequently reproduced in KSČM. Put in ideological terms, the

¹⁸ Two former ministers of interior could receive membership in the party again and could publish in *Halo noviny*. Former leading journalist of the communist daily *Rude pravo*, who has been perceived as a symbol of "normalisation" and ideological dogmatism before 1989, has been the one of the main commentators of *Halo noviny*.

¹⁹ So in 1992, KSČM collected 14,05% of votes and ČSSD 6,52%. In 1996 KSČM achieved 10,33% and ČSSD 26,44%, in 1998 11% and 32,3% and in 2002 18,5% and 30,2%. See election statistics on *Volby v České republice*.

government of the social democrat Špidla has been portrayed as conducting class struggle against the unprivileged majority of the country (Heller, 2003, 36).

The return to the traditional attitude to the non-communist left can be partly explained by the party's strategy. As mentioned above, the KSČM leadership (membership base of 354 549 in 1992, currently 107 000) enjoyed a convenient electoral support by just preserving the party as a primarily inward-looking entity. ČSSD, having much smaller membership base (currently 16 000 members) and reflecting the wider social-political trend of moving towards the centre, could have never afforded any such strategy. It chose to develop in the direction of a "catch all" party, competing for the electorate in the broader left-of-centre political space. Arguably, it might have come as a surprise to the conservatives within KSČM that ČSSD – the only of those political parties banned by the communist regime before 1989 – made it back to national politics. Moreover, ČSSD left KSČM behind in each national election since mid 1990s. In fact, the rebirth of ČSSD took place roughly at the same time, when KSČM chose a "re-" rather than a "de-Bolshevisation". Doing so, KSČM helped ČSSD indirectly to take upon itself the task to integrate the wider left.

Since ČSSD has formed the Czech governments, KSČM has experienced upgrading of its position and started to "show muscles" to its left competitor: according to Chairman Grebeníček, ČSSD was not to be taken seriously any more. KSČM would not be ready to "take mercy" on ČSSD unless it changed (Grebeníček, 2003). It contrasts with the offers of the KSČM to establish a viable co-operation of the "left parties".

The party's *attitude to the (so-called) socialist states* represents another important political test case. The issues are primarily the human right standards and other democratic principles. The party's failure at least to distance itself from the most problematic and unacceptable examples of abuses of human rights and political freedoms reinforces the ambiguous image of KSČM. Only several representatives (such as M.Ransdorf) expressed at least a regret regarding the trials against Cuban dissidents in March-April, 2003. The party's *Halo noviny* clearly supported the opinion that the sentences for the dissidents should in fact be harder. Similarly, the party's leadership (like most of the other left organisations including the majority of the ČSSD) opposed the war in Iraq while distancing itself from Saddam Hussein's regime. The conservatives, however, criticised mainly the American imperialism, leaving the terrorist dictatorship of Hussein mostly aside. *Halo noviny* and *Naše Pravda* created often even an impression that they sided with the Saddam's regime.

The party's focus on "socialist states" suggests the preservation of the traditional anti-Western understanding of the anti-capitalist orientation of the party. West European countries have achieved higher average social-economic and human rights standards of the "unprivileged" people than did the socialist Czechoslovakia before 1989. Nonetheless, the party has never discussed the west-European social model (both its advantages and its flaws) publicly in any detail. Instead China, Northern Korea or Cuba and other "socialist states" nearly monopolise "good press" and positive references in KSČM.

The attitude demonstrates existence of widely diverging views about socialism within the party. The neo-communists define the socialism as self-governing social-economic formation based on self-governing ownership (Heller, 2003). The unqualified admiration for China, though, indicates that majority of the party has still maintained its view of socialism as of a combination of two crucial elements: a total political control by the Communist party on the one and a dominating role of the state ownership of major means of production on the other hand. The latter can be combined with creation of the islands of unrestrained capitalism of 19th century.

The KSČM programme points towards further "socialisation" of the western European political and social-economic model (Pro Demokratickou, 2004). But the nature of the "socialisation" has been blurred by this divergence between the concept of socialism in the programme on the one hand and the political preferences on the other. The latter clearly pointed at China. As the leading commentator of *Haló noviny* explains, the Chinese economic growth is a result of the functioning "socialist system" and of the fact that in China there is "more real democracy than in the so-called democratic world" (Kojzar, 2003).

Also, the *attitude to the EU and NATO* have been issues of crucial political importance, which the two left-wing parties approached differently. Some political leaders and substantial parts of membership on both sides have had compatible opinions on a number of related issues. However, the general strategy of the two parties differ substantially. Obviously, both EU and NATO have been persistent objects of dispute between the neo-communists and conservatives within the KSČM itself.

ČSSD has been in political terms one of the most pro-European actors in the Czech republic (Euromanifest ČSSD, 2001). At the same time, the existing modus vivendi between the ideational streams in KSČM does not allow more than a compromise between the activist (neo-communist) approach and negativist (conservative) standing. The resulting "soft No" to the EU-accession contrasts with the strategy of the ČSSD, which invested into the accession all its political capital.

As regards NATO, ČSSD seeks to maintain the alliance with the USA, even if it does not share American views on multilateralism and the use of force. In the longer run, enhancement of multilateralism and development of a functioning (not anti-American) ESDP are priorities of ČSSD security policy (Základní (dlouhodobý) program ČSSD, 2003).

KSČM has "emphatically rejected NATO membership" and has promoted the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) as an alternative (S lidmi, 2002, 15). Only the neo-communists come close to ČSSD when they seek to make the best use of Czech membership to NATO. The aim is to transform the Alliance into an instrument of preventive conflict resolution and a collective security system. Also, they argue the European security and defence policy should be fully developed.²⁰

3. Conclusions:

The relations between KSČM and ČSSD have developed from mutual ignorance to a pragmatic low-key co-operation based on overwhelming programmatic compatibility. The limits of such co-operation have been – on the one hand – the identity and image of the KSČM, and – on the other - mutual political and ideological competition and differences. The two parties have shared parts of their constituency but have followed opposite political/electoral strategies as yet. ČSSD sought hegemony in the area between hard left and political centre. The 'strategy of leftist retreat' of the KSČM focused primarily on preservation of its traditional membership base and constituency. It was the "retreat coalition" of conservative and traditionalist streams, which has shaped image of KSČM more than the neo-communist modernisers have. Therefore, the majority of the Czech society, KSČM has been viewed primarily as a negativist party of conservative socialist political and cultural protest.

²⁰ J.Dolejš, 7.1.2003

As such, it has gained considerable support by the electorate (18,5% in 2002) and surpassed ČSSD in public opinion polls. At the same time, it has combined radical political and ideological protest with utilitarian co-operation with its ideological opponents. The neo-communist modernisers, whose positions are largely compatible with the left within the ČSSD, have been the driving forces of the programmatic development. Yet, even if often supported by policy-oriented traditionalists, they still had to operate within the existing *modus vivendi* with the "retreat coalition". The result has been an only temperate programmatic modernisation of the party. During the 6th Congress of the party in May 2004, all streams are likely to seek redefinition of the *modus vivendi* in their favour.

A change of the party's political strategy from the introvert/retreat mode into an open/active mode reaching beyond the traditionalist constituency would increase the competition with ČSSD in the nearest future. In the longer run, however, it could result in development of a modern "hard" left and create a basis for a gradual rapprochement with the non-communist left.

The 6th Congress will, however, hardly bring about a radical change to KSČM strategy. Given the *modus vivendi* between the individual streams within the party, it is difficult to imagine that the Congress would smooth the most important differences in the policy and programme of KSČM and ČSSD. These will probably further include sensitive and politically significant issues, such as the attitude to the past, the radical opposition of KSČM to the present political and economic system, its attitude to the EU and NATO, the unreserved support of the party of and admiration for China or Cuba.

The coalition potential of KSČM has remained very limited on the national level. ČSSD, which has overcome the anti-left bias in the society only by late 1990s, has a narrow room for manoeuvre if it wants to seek a formal co-operation with communists. KSČM preserved its nature of a "Leninist party" (so Fausto Sorino, a leader of Italy's Party of Communist Refoundation) (Bigges, 2002). As such it has effectively deterred ČSSD from a full-scale co-operation on national level as yet.

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