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Introduction of the election cycle model: The case of Czech republic 2006-2007

Anna Matušková, Otto Eibl¹

Abstract

The aim of this paper is to analyze how the political marketing was used and applied in the electoral campaign 2006 and how marketing influenced and changed the party's behaviour (even after the elections). Political marketing can be described as the use of marketing concepts and methods in politics. It allows us to analyze political parties from a new and different perspective. We focus mainly on the relevant political subjects (which successfully entered the Parliament) with a special accent on the campaign of Social Democrats (ČSSD). The objectives of this paper are to analyze the electoral process as changing and developing activity and answer following questions. How the party formulated their strategies and how they use political communication. Secondly, to review how the campaign was organized. Thirdly, what attitude does the Czech political parties towards campaigning and elections and what changes we can expect in this field?

Methodologically, we will approach it by introducing the Election Cycle Model. It is a heuristic model and it examines elections, campaigning and governing as mutually influenced process. We are aware that the model was tailored for the Czech Elections 2006; anyway, it provides us with a very solid framework for further analysis of the party's behaviour.

Key words: Political communication, Election Cycle Model, Elections, Professionalization, Czech Republic, ODS, ČSSD

Introduction

Political communication and exploitation of political marketing strategies in the electoral competition are no longer only concern of party analysts. They become highly interesting for social scientist as well. The recent development in party politics shows clearly: contemporary (modern) political parties eventually devolve on more or less professional style of politics.

Mainly, it concerns the level of party communication with voters and the ability to persuade them. The motivation is very clear, to reach better election support and in long-term perspective better strategic results. Political parties are hiring external consultants, marketing experts and agencies, who prepares "scenario" for further party activities (Plasser 2002: 251, O'Shaughnessy 1990: 128-148, Wring 2005: 2-5 and others). However, to prove the increase of impact of political marketing on a political scene is a difficult process. It is necessary to choose the appropriate criteria, which will enable to examine behaviour of political parties and in this case their market (marketing) orientation in particular.

The selection of appropriate criteria is a crucial problem in this particular research field. Professionalism of the party's behaviour is taken for granted, but no one can say, how to measure it.

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During the last decades, plenty of models and classification were introduced. The models usually offer set of tools for analyzing the changes in party behaviour (A. Panebianco, D. M. Farrell, P. Norris etc.) or concentrate on political campaign development (Wring 2005). Logically these are very often influenced by the chosen criteria and political culture of the scrutinized environment. The above said does not mean that these models are not relevant or accurate, it just emphasises the heterogeneity of the research and its capability to encompass all the relevant issues.

Moreover, existing models are usually focused on the pre-election period i.e. election campaigns. However, political competition has to be viewed as a complex process and thus it has to be analysed. Therefore, we attempt to introduce (partly) a new model. The Election Cycle Model is complex (but still simplified) model including the political process, election cycle, party's behaviour and political culture. Our main aim is to cover the whole election cycle with consideration for strategies of relevant participants (political parties, voters etc.). First part of the paper deals with the description and explanation of the model.

Secondly, we focus on the Czech party system. The central line of election contest will be identified. The long-term conflict between Civic Democratic Party (ODS) and the Czech Social Democratic Party (ČSSD) sets very good example of capacity, flexibility and use of various political marketing methods. In the proposed model, we try to show, how intensive the political communication can be beyond the pre-election period. Our effort is to identify the tendencies towards a permanent campaigning and market orientation of political parties. Therefore, our categorization of political parties present in the Czech parliament will be introduced. This categorization will be based on their communication and marketing strategies.

We are aware that already existing models such as the Lees Marshment model of marketing process Jennifer Lees-Marshment and Darren Lilleker (2004) or focusing on the framework introduced by Aron O'Cass (1996), R.P. Ormrod (2005) and others might be of a good use in the particular case of the Czech Republic. However, to introduce new model, which seems more appropriate to us is a challenge and an opportunity for further researcher in this particular area of politics.

Theoretical outline – introduction of the new model

The basic outline derives from the model of “electoral market²” by polish political scientist Marzena Cichosz (Cichosz 2002: 94) and from general election cycle model (Nordhaus 1975, Lindbeck 1976, Rogoff 1990³). The general election cycle model is based on the assumption: as the

² The electoral market is understood as the place for political interactions and transaction such as elections among political parties, media and voters. Economical, law, political and socio-demographic factors, defines the market.

³ Rogoff 1990 (c.f. Lidborn 2003: 5-6) operates with three phases of the election cycle: (a) Pre-election

these parties) and by “competence”, we mean the ability to persuade voters, the party can solve the salient problems (the case “A” and “B”) and that the party offers the best solution or alternative for the future (“C”).

These strategies incorporate the reassurance about the correctness of governmental actions and about their benefit for most voters (“B”). It is followed by convincing the voters about positive influence of the governing policy by furthering pre-elections policies or more precisely pre-election promises (“A”). Another part shows the criticism and attack on the political opponents (“C”).

Single political actors are systematically building background for another competition in the next electoral term. Voters consider in their party evaluation not only their success but also the ability to communicate their failures. Political parties communicate with their voters all the time and try to catch the voter’s attention. The purposes of this activity are to keep at least minimal cognisance about the political party, its role in the party system, eventual benefit for the voters and the political system in general. To draw somebody’s attention can be done in many ways – the party organizes unexpected press conferences on the actual topics, they use paper advertisements, public meetings and many other events. The form of communications relates to the party position in the system (e.g. the relations between government and opposition). It is likely that the communication style of the governing party is going to be more “serious” and concentrate on relevant topics, to the contrary of the opposition. Opposition parties choose to communicate more emotional and radical topics.

Clearly, the party communication strategies do not proceed in the social vacuum. Parties listen to *vox populi* during the election cycle and try to change the public opinion and mood (at the same time they are aware that they should at least partly fulfil their election promises⁶). The public opinion became very often the strongest argument used by opposition for explaining political issues. If the government is forced to introduce reforms with negative influence on some social segments, the opposition immediately accuses the government of upstaging other segments. The same situations applies to assertion of governmental politicise. If the opposition is very good in controlling and using the public opinion, it can create very difficult conditions for the governing parties. At once the public opinion and demands of electorate are very important for both – governing parties and opposition. The aim of the paper is not to claim that political actors should change their policies every time when the opinion polls are announced. Nevertheless, monitoring the social trends and opinions can be very helpful in creating party policies and formulating the party rhetoric.

To make the model simple it shows e.g. the phase of “market intelligence” and “policy adjusting”

⁶ In the case, that party must create the coalition and sign the coalition agreement it is obvious the delivery might become more complicated. Contrary if the party can create one coloured government, it is necessary to concentrate on delivery.

only once, although those activities are usually conducted continuously. In the phase “campaign”, we propose double evaluation of political actors – firstly based on their former policies and secondly based on their programmes for forthcoming elections and the impact of campaign. During the campaign, the parties seek for best position to attack their opponents and introduce their political proposal – programme, leadership and the main campaign topics (see Figure 2.).

Figure 2 Political campaign structures

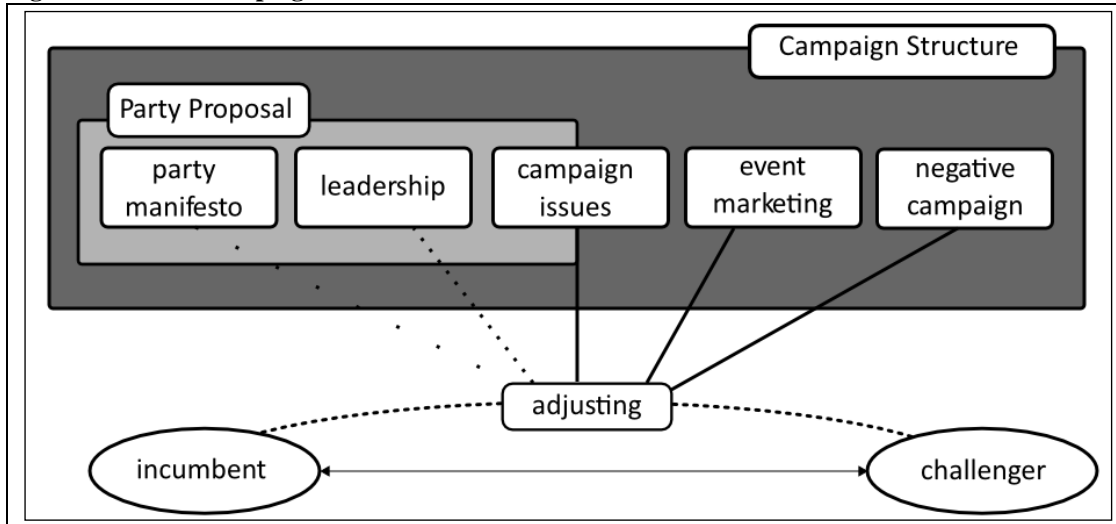


Figure 2 shows the importance and possibilities that result from further working with campaign structure. Obviously, it is very difficult to change some parts of the campaign (specifically the programme). Leadership, campaign issues and others can be modified in connection with changes in opinion polls or opponents strategies. It makes campaigns more dynamic and attractive for voters.

The product (programme) and its package (campaign) are prepared in advance (e.g. the Czech Social Democrats start with market intelligence more than one year before the actual elections) and they are based on market intelligence, party competence and “issue ownership”. The party proposal is based on set of topics, which the voters automatically associate with the party⁷ (issue ownership Petrocik 1996, Eibl 2006: 31-35)⁸. Additionally the party must deal with actual topics (salient issues) and partly on those presented by their opponents (see Table 1).

Table 1 Election Campaign Structure: Issues Typology

⁷ Every party has a certain image and identity. It is usually based on values, ideology or tradition. The party should keep clear image and not to change its identity radically

⁸ Sensitive problematic topic demanding instant solution gives the party advantage. It also strengthens its competence in the contest with political actors (issue salience Bélanger 2005, Kleinnijenhuis, De Ridder 1998, van der Brug 2004, Soroka 2002, McCombs 2005: 550).

Election Manifesto	Election Campaign	Leadership	Spin Doctoring/ Negative marketing	Event Management
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - manifesto issues - campaign issues - owned issues - strategic issues - defence issues 			

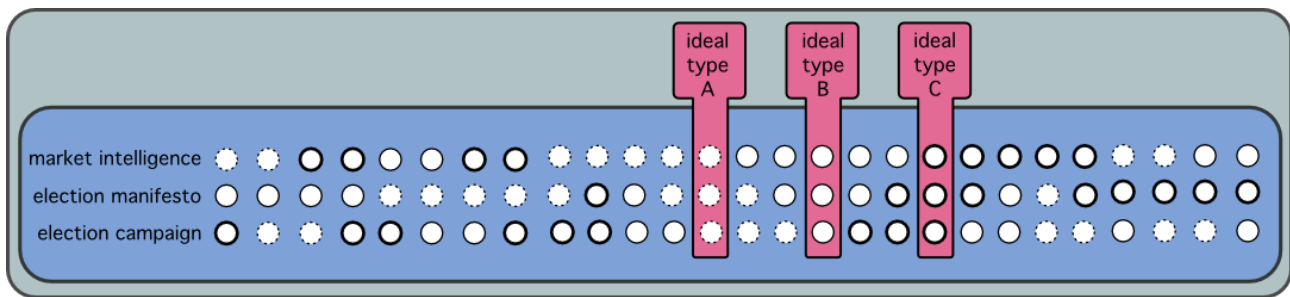
Table 1 shows the typology of various particular issues. It differs among manifesto, campaign, owned, strategic and defence issues. Generally, it can be said, that in the campaign firstly appear “owned” issues (which are understood as “winning” topics). In mutual interaction, the strategic and defensive issues follow (position and high conflict issues). They can be understood as the structural issues that are dominant in the public discourse. Therefore, every party must take up their position (Hinrichs 2002: 52).

We gradually introduce the set of strategies and activities, which help parties to succeed in the elections and persuade the voters during the term. This enables the creation of party categorization based on strategies used. We do not claim to create absolute classification. On the contrary, we understand categorization as a dynamic scale that represents ideal types. The parties meet these types only approximately.

For party's behaviour, we use three parameters (see figure 3) – market intelligence, party manifesto (as the definition of product in broader sense) and campaign (in broader sense again – election campaign, permanent campaign). Here again we are aware of the simplification, but we do not consider it a disadvantage for the model. Contrary, involving more parameters would make the categorization even more complicated (in the introduced model, there are 27 possible combinations. Adding one parameter would enhance the number of combinations up to 256).

Similarly, to the Lees-Marshment model, we work with three ideal types. In contrast to the original model, we do not take into account the delivery phase. We regarded only party strategies without any further evaluation. Consequently, we can study political parties from the functional-instrumental point of view more precisely and we can focus on the communication-marketing strategies base.

Figure 3 Party categorization



The ideal party type A does not concentrate on any of monitored factors (market intelligence, manifesto and campaign). Nevertheless, this does not automatically mean that this party fails at the elections. This strategy can be chosen e.g. by minority party which does not need emphasize the election programme its support roots in their identity. In some cases, this strategy can be effective for one-single issue party or populist formation (but in combination with strong and visible campaign.)

The ideal party type B devotes to all factors intermediate attention. Without huge effort (and without surprising results) such a party can enter the parliament. Their support is based on traditional voters but they can also represent an alternative to the governing party.

The example C stands for professional political party. The party concentrates on analyzing the electoral market, follows the opinion polls and leads flexible campaign. During the term, the party is not only “ruling” but also “informing” about its results. If the party is in opposition, it is a very active and carping critic.

Application of the model: The Czech Elections 2006

As we already mentioned the model was tailored for the Czech conditions. Therefore, we start with short introduction to the Czech political system.

Czech Republic (along with Hungary) is usually considered a country with the most consolidated political scene among the countries of former Soviet block⁹. The Czech Republic is a parliamentary democracy with small electoral market. Legislative power is vested in a two-chamber parliament: the House of Deputies (lower house) and the Senate (upper house). The clearly dominant role is assigned to the lower house, which has 200 members and is elected by proportional electoral system (Stojarová – Šedo – Kopeček – Chytilék 2007: 48)¹⁰, which slightly favours larger political parties. The Senate has 81 members, which are elected by majority vote in two-round run-off system. In our

⁹ See Kopecek - Šedo 2003: *Czech and Slovak political parties and their vision of European Integration*.

¹⁰ The Czech Republic is divided into 14 constituencies (5-25 seats for distribution). A legal threshold is set at 5 % for single party, 10 % for two-member coalition, 15 % for three-member coalition and 20 % for 4 (and more) parties. Voters can distribute up to two preferences for their favourite candidates on semi-closed party lists. The distribution of seats proceeds on base of d'Hondt divisor (Stojarová – Šedo – Kopeček – Chytilék 2007: 16).

article we focus on the lower house of the Czech parliament, the House of Deputies.

There are five parties in the current Czech House of Deputies, The Czech Social Democratic Party (*Česká strana sociálně demokratická*, ČSSD), The Christian and Democratic Union – Czechoslovak People's Party (*Křesťanská a demokratická unie – Československá strana lidová*, KDU-ČSL), Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (*Komunistická strana Čech a Moravy*, KSČM), conservative Civic Democratic Party (*Občanská demokratická strana*, ODS) and the Green Party (*Strana zelených*, SZ). Most of them retained a stable and territorially homogeneous electorate support since the mid 1990s (with exception of KDU-ČSL and SZ; for more details see Šedo – Chytilík 2007). The practical structure of the Czech electoral market is similarly settled and solid: the system keeps its five-party format, (which was confirmed by the Green Party entering the Parliament in the last election “replacing” Freedom Union (US-DEU). There is also a gradual strengthening of the support of the two strongest parties (recently they obtained almost 68% of votes/155 seats). In the longer term, this confirms the stability and durability of the parties in the House of Deputies. Despite this tendency the system remains open to new actors, who nevertheless mainly represent an alternative to the smaller parties rather than a threat to the established “big” parties (Eibl – Chytilík 2007: 172).

However, it is not an easy task to apply standard Sartorian typology on the Czech party system. As the main poles of the Czech party system we can identify the liberal-conservative right wing ODS on the one side and the left-wing ČSSD on the other. However, the logic of practical functioning is strongly influenced by the presence of a “third (half-) pole” – Communist Party. KSČM is the only non-transformed (ex) communist party in Central Europe. All other parties refuse to co-operate at governmental level. Therefore, the party has a very low coalition building potential and represent anti-system opposition (Mareš 2002: 83).

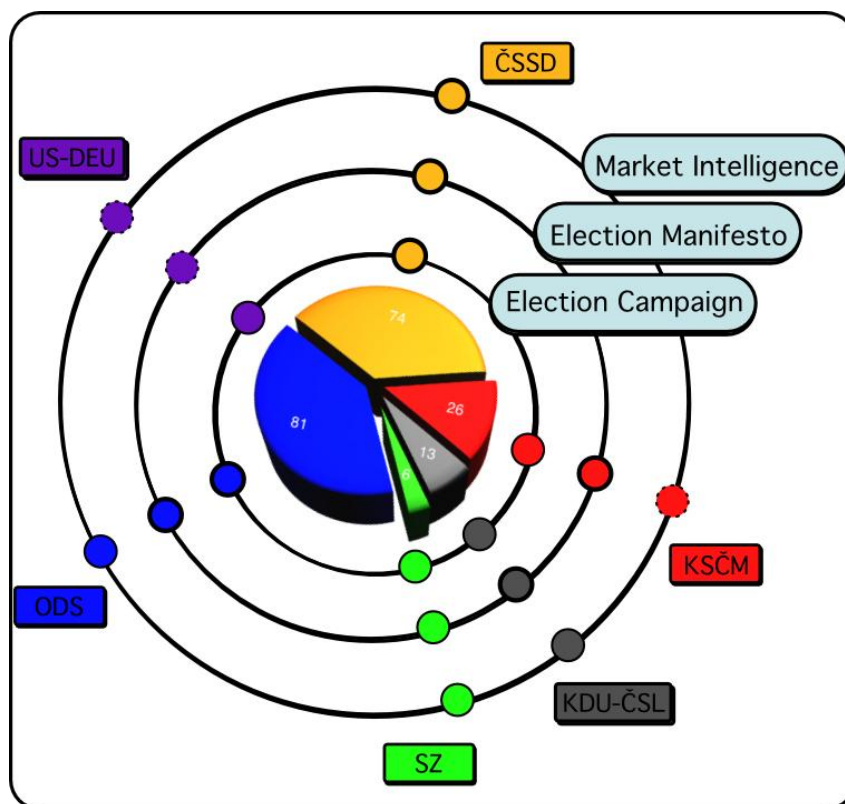
Czech political scientists (Strmiska 2007, Kopeček - Hloušek 2001 and others) according to the Sartorian tradition, consider the Czech party system to be a semi-polarized pluralism. This corresponds to the configuration of poles, including character of the minor pole embodied by the KSČM, and with polarity-related notion of party interactions, including the specific field of interaction between ČSSD and KSČM. Such a situation is especially complicated for the Social democrats, because they partly share similar agenda with the Communists. The shift towards polarized pluralism could start by opening the cooperation between the two left-wing parties on the governmental level, or at least by (open) supporting a minority ČSSD cabinet by KSČM. However, this topic is extremely sensitive as mentioned above. The topic of anti-communism is a conflicting one and plays and important role in the electoral contest.

The importance of the Elections 2006 and post-election development in the 2007

To find an own clear position on the electoral market was one of the most important parts of the electoral strategy preparation in the 2006 general elections¹¹. There were four key players – Civic Democrats, Social Democrats, Christian Democrats and Communist.

The winner of the 2006 general elections with the historically highest score of 35,38 % (81 seats) was the conservative Civic Democratic Party (ODS). ODS was followed by the Czech Social Democratic Party (ČSSD; 74 seats)¹², the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (KSČM; 26 seats), the Christian and Democratic Union – Czechoslovak People's Party (KDU-ČSL, 13 seats). A surprise was an electoral success of the Green Party (SZ; 6 seats). The total electoral turnout was 64,7 % (www.volby.cz).

Figure 4 Election 2006 results and party categorization



¹¹ The way of political parties' candidature in Parliamentary elections is determined by law No. 247/1995 Coll., about elections to the Czech Republic Parliament, what also appears in the form of the electoral campaign. As it was already said, in a Czech campaign it is not possible to use a paid TV advertisement on commercial channels. The conditions of financing and sponsorship are regulated as well.

¹² The Czech Social Democratic Party is not an ex-communist party but authentic social democratic party with the tradition before the World War II.

In the Czech, party system as the figure 5 shows tends to the categories „B“ and „C“¹³. In the paper, we will concentrate on two parties, which represent the main poles of the Czech party system. Civic democrats (ODS) and Social democrats (ČSSD) – both parties use developed communication and marketing strategies to prepare an attractive product for voters. ČSSD entered the elections as the incumbent and ODS as the awaited challenger with a “nick” economy expert. The way both parties prepared and campaigned for the general elections in 2006 became a significant boundary mark in the short campaign tradition in the Czech Republic. The campaign raised an exceptional medial and public attention. It exceeded Czech standards by its intensity as well as contents and the level of visual processing. The campaign was labelled as negative, brutal, aggressive, confrontational, offensive and low (Matušková 2006b: 5).

It is important to stress out initially that the campaign was more thematically orientated than any other was and it concentrated on programme questions. On the other hand, the campaign was substantially personalized and the pre-electoral match escalated into a sharp duel of the two leaders Mirek Topolánek¹⁴ (Civic Democrat) and Jiří Paroubek (Social Democrat) in spite of a fact that the Czech Republic has a proportional electoral system, which concentrates more on a party competition. The chairperson of the two leading parties ODS and ČSSD were presented to the public by Electoral Staff as future prime ministers and representatives of two ways, which Czech politics would follow further. Right or left, with or without the communists¹⁵. The social democrats indirectly admit a possibility of making the coalition with Communist. This supported hugely the polarization of the campaign.

The electoral scene was polarized by media and the overall atmosphere culminated with pre-electoral TV duels, into which only the leaders of ODS and ČSSD were invited. The main topic of elections became a conflict between the governing ČSSD and medially favoured ODS (see Petrová 2006). The way that ČSSD used to build the campaign also fundamentally influenced the electoral presentation of ODS. Hindsight to the campaign process and dynamics confirms that it involved a consciously led and well-realized electoral strategy of ČSSD. The total outcome of the campaign resulted largely in suppression of small political subjects (as it happened e.g. with KDU-ČSL or KSČM), which were not able to raise interest of the media. The exception is the Green Party and its unexpected electoral success.

¹³ The category C fits for the party Freedom Union (US-DEU).

¹⁴ Mirek Topolánek, the chairman of ODS became a prime minister and built the government after elections

¹⁵ Regarding the historical fact, the question of anti-communism in former post-communist countries is still considered a significantly sensitive subject.

Heavy weight battle: ODS vs. ČSSD¹⁶

In the following part of the text, we will concentrate closely on the electoral campaigns of ČSSD (incumbent) and ODS (challenger). Their long and severe “match” lasted during the whole campaign. All other parties overshadowed their campaigning style, supported by media. The final contest was reduced to the duel among Topolánek (ODS) and Paroubek (ČSSD).

According to the opinion polls ODS lead since the January 2005 in front of ČSSD (Kunštát 2006). ODS entered the election campaign with topics regarding economy and social reforms. In the November 2005 Civic Democrats organized party convention in Brno and draw media attention. All TV channels transmitted a picture of the future election winner and informed about planned social reforms (Matušková 2006c). The main topic of the convention was presentation of the flat tax reform – an issue that was meant as the main campaign topic. The highest peak of the convention was presentation of election spot “*On the blue path together*” (Renč: 2005) the same claim was used as party slogan.

In the year, 2004 before the election to European Parliament the party ODS organized a wide survey. The results showed very clearly dissatisfaction of loyal voters with arrogant image of the party. The party was perceived as reckless organizations only for businesspersons. There was need to introduce new fresh image. Changes came together with the new leader Mirek Topolánek, who replaced Václav Klaus, one of the founding fathers of the party. Václav Klaus is the president of the Czech Republic and he is very well known for his distinctive image.

The flagship of the campaign should be already mentioned flat tax reform. ODS decided to avoid the negative image and attacks of their opponents (later in the campaign they tried to introduce negative campaign towards ČSSD but without any visible success¹⁷). The campaign was planned as decentralized and was different in regions. The Prague campaign was exceptional in all aspects (they choose even different colours and lay out). Topolánek as the party leader joined the campaign intensively from May 2006.

ČSSD started to work systematically on the preparation of their political offer and electoral strategy a year prior to the elections (Social Democrats were noticeably behind ODS in opinion polls). The party was not internally united and it had to face many medial scandals¹⁸. That led to the replacement of the Prime Minister Stanislav Gross in the government leadership by the outstanding Jiří Paroubek. Paroubek succeeded to unify the party extremely quickly, at least on the outside. In

¹⁶ The chapter is based on information from the interview with Jiří Šnéberger – campaign manager of ODS and with Alexander Braun from PSB Associates, Prague June 26 2006.

¹⁷ In the January 2006, the party introduced campaign „Masks“. The aim of the posters campaign was to accuse the Social Democrats of cooperation with Communist (ODS 2006b). However, the advertising agency euroAWK refused to post the posters.

¹⁸ The resignation of the Social Democrat Prime Minister Stanislav Gross because of the unexplained financing of his apartment or the Unipetrol case, Diag Human and many others

researches of public opinions, he ranked very quickly amongst the most popular politicians in the country.

One of the biggest election surprises was¹⁹ that Social Democrats hired the American consulting company Penn, Schoen and Berland Associates, Inc. (PSB) to do the campaign preparations. PSB was responsible for groundwork of the electoral strategy and marketing-oriented campaign. They provided for ČSSD after the series of focus groups a large benchmarking poll. In this poll, they laid a great stress on the way voters perceive the running political subject and how voters react on the offered political programmes and individual program tasks. The agency further prepared a model indicating how the voter preferences could further develop under certain circumstances. This poll made up the core of the whole campaign. The researches also showed that voters do not connect a party with specific politics and clear image only a year prior to the elections. Therefore, one of the main tasks in the campaign was to find an advantageous position on the electoral market and use this advantage coming from the fact that ČSSD stood as a candidate from a position of the leading country and it guaranteed practically permanent medial attention. At the same time, it also limited the party in formulating of the main topics for the campaign. It was necessary to persistently point out government achievements, to defend and promote government politics and the resolutions accepted.

ODS held a completely different position and entered into the elections with a clear image of the businessmen party that (after eight years in opposition) has no other ambition than winning the elections and carry out radical economical reforms even at the expense of social benefits.

So ČSSD was confronted by several fundamental targets – to link its brand with a clear content, to attack the favourite position of ODS and their main programme points. Social Democrats chose social securities as the main topic of the campaign with the motto *Welfare and Prosperity*. The electoral programme was named identically. The purpose of the motto was to persuade voters about their expert role. ODS choose a different strategy – they decided to introduce every week on the programme chapter. Therefore, ČSSD could not downright criticise the electoral programme. In March, Civic Democrats had “ODS plus” posters pinned up all over the Czech Republic to promote the tax reform²⁰. Immediately afterwards striking blue posters with a title “ODS minus” appeared in the streets, using the graphic elements typical for ODS quoting some of the programme theses.

¹⁹ BBDO, Saatchi and Saatchi and other foreign advertising agencies and consulting companies cooperated with Czech political parties in the early the 90s. However, this was not bilaterally satisfactory cooperation. Experts from advertising agencies were often complaining about the cooperation. Politicians are not easy to believe or accepted their working methods. Czech campaigns are mainly labour intensive (Farrell, 1998) and electoral strategies are often prepared by politicians, they want to have their last word. Very often are used services of Czech commercial and advertising agencies are hired (Matušková 2006b).

²⁰ The advertising campaign “ODS plus” was profoundly inspired by negative ads “Merkel Minus” used by German Social Democrats (SPD) against tax reform presented by Christian Democratic Union (CDU) in parliamentary Election 2005.

Posters announced – we will apply education fees, cancel free healthcare, increase taxes and others. It can be said that ČSSD reacted just immediately. Their response “ODS minus” was extremely effective in criticizing the proposed tax reform. A classical method of negative advertisement is to attack intentionally the electoral strategy of the strongest competitor, whereas the attacks should be as personalized as possible (Cwalina 2004: 110-11).

By their attacks on the tax, reform Social Democracy successfully deprived ODS of the main theme of the campaign. Social Democrats also attacked the ODS programme in electoral spots, whose meaning should not be overestimated within the frame of the campaign²¹.

Even though it was purely a political fight, the public was taken aback by the intensity of the negative campaign. Negative advertisement is an exceptionally effective weapon that can be double-edged. At a certain point, the level of criticism can turn against its author. During the campaign, ČSSD kept a positive image practically with no problems. ODS was not able to effectively and clearly react to the systematic attacks of ČSSD. Moreover, they could not attack their opponents. The voter research showed that those who vote for Civic Democrats do not perceive usage of negative campaigning positively.

After losing the main topic of campaign ODS became somehow lost in the campaign. In addition, the whole process was under Social Democrats control. They were steering the campaign stream.

ČSSD put together its product – electoral programme as well as strategy, which was successfully promoted throughout the whole campaign. The electoral programme was logically influenced by values – a classical social democratic catalogue. In further campaign, targeting ČSSD was outstandingly successful, its main goal was to eliminate a situation where it is decided about Social Democrats as about an appropriate governmental party, but on the contrary, where it is being decided whether ODS can stand its ground as a governmental party.

Social Democrats therefore tried to present the campaign systematically as a form of referendum about the future of the Civic Democrats. The deciding moment was the fact that Jiří Paroubek was a strong leader, whose popularity highly exceeded the popularity of the party. In case of opposing ODS it was an opposite situation – its leader Mirek Topolánek was perceived as a weak politician and his party as a strong one. Therefore, PSB recommended ČSSD to lead the campaign consciously as a duel of two leaders. This strategy was foremost advantageous; it enabled the party to divert the attention from its thematic emptiness. To lead the campaign, as a constructive duel of

²¹ The government law limits the telecasting of political adverts in the Czech Republic and it can be telecast only in the hours determined by law (No. 247/1995) on the Czech Television. The importance of political spots is therefore reduced to a sort of “obligation” that the parties must fulfil within the electoral fight, what projects negatively into the quality of political adverts. Should the election law not be changed, we cannot expect in the future that the importance of electoral spots will rise significantly. The spots are inspired by American spots from the years 1992 and 1996, but also by the German and Polish electoral campaign in 2005.

manifestos (programmes) was much more efficient for ODS. Civic Democrats were trying to lead the campaign thematically.

Communication in the Campaign– Realization and Visual appearance

The results from focus groups showed clearly, that Social Democrats are lacking clear image. The solution was to change it radically, ČSSD used in their campaign new colour – traditional yellow was replaced by orange (on advice of PSB), which is connected with the sun, power, wealth, joy and reign (Janik-Wiszniewska: 174). The beginning of the campaign was preceded by the January Programme Conference where Social Democrats introduced their new image. Since then orange colour appeared everywhere (on electoral busses, roses given out by leaders or skirts of hosts and nametags on the electoral gathering). Shortly after appeared thematic billboards (very simply compiled) appeared, concentrating on presenting social values (free education, healthcare, etc.).

ČSSD chose negative advertisement as one of the main means of communication and the second intended strategy was to centre the campaign on Jiří Paroubek – the Prime Minister and a strong leader. Contrary, ODS was trying to promote not only their leader Topolánek but other politicians too²². Paroubek skilfully used medial support of foreign politicians and during the campaign appeared in public with the former German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder, French President Jacques Chirac, British Prime Minister Tony Blair and many others. Blair then supported his colleague in the campaign and gave him for instance two double-deckers²³. As the response to the Blair's gift, Topolánek met David Cameron at the Ruzyně Airport and they exchanged little models of blue buses (Marjanovič 2006).

Social Democrats distinguished in the campaign also by an extraordinary ability to react swiftly to competitors' steps. ČSSD regularly analysed the public opinion researches and thanks to a good knowledge of political market, it was able to react quickly to the moves of ODS. As a reaction to one of the final pre-electoral ODS spots, where a ČSSD cabinet was introduced as a “government without a face”, Jiří Paroubek called a press conference the next day to introduce the form of his cabinet in case the party wins elections. Paroubek worked intensely on using voter researches and its publicity in the media, when the results were not in favour of ČSSD, the researches were not made public. They used the researches as a medially political means and this way created the election winner image. Generally, the ČSSD campaign made a unified impression and the campaign

²² It was especially visible in the TV debates. The first debates attended Mr. Paroubek only by himself. His colleagues and consultants (Petr Gandalovič, Miroslava Němcová and others) on the contrary always accompanied Mr. Topolánek. This was the reason why Social democrats entitled Mr. Topolánek as weak and incompetent leader. Topolánek strategy was to show is a team player and that his teams consist of highly qualified experts.

²³ The tradition of electoral buses in ČSSD established Miloš Zeman who went through the Czech Republic in a bus called Zemák in 1996.

was centralized. Social Democrats used “traditional” methods (numerous meeting with voters, public debates, various region events and concert series with popular singers etc.). New room was also dedicated to for the “new” methods (above all the internet – ČSSD created special election website www.volbycr.cz). High level of flexibility in communication with voters can be considered as huge party achievement. The campaign was visible, fast and aggressive, constant attacking of opponents enabled the party to hide their own thematic emptiness.

For the first time in the Czech Republic the internet played significant role in the Elections. ODS created special election pages as well. The party leader Topolánek converted his pages regularly, he himself played very interesting role in the campaign. He was exposed to systematic flow of strong attacks on his person from Jiří Paroubek. Comparing to very strong social democratic leader Topolánek looks at the beginning very blank. Nevertheless, his power was in communication with common people during the campaign. Since May, he was engaged in the campaign together with his wife and they travelled from one Czech city to another. Topolánek was very becoming more persuasive and more confident in his new role.

An impression that elections are a referendum between ODS and ČSSD were supported by media, too. To the final TV debates, only the party leaders Topolánek and Paroubek were invited (on other party leaders). Their duel then impersonated a symbolical peak of the campaign. Political adverts do not have high ratings (considering the airtime) whereas the debates had high ratings (Petrová 2006). The electoral team of media advisers of Mirek Topolánek concentrated on the last three debates and tried to create for their candidate the image of a serious politician and public official. The aim was to make Topolánek act pragmatically as the professional politicians and to focus on promoting of the programme and particular topics. He always entered the TV showroom with little team of advisers and helpers. Paroubek was always alone and in the last debates, the tiredness was visible. The campaign conclusion concentrated on raising emotions amongst voters, the main topic was anti-communism. The role of public opinion researches was also interesting. TV debates were always followed by assessing their results and a question about who has “won” the debate. In this case, both parties had researches clearly supporting their candidate. ODS cooperated with Factum Invenio and ČSSD with STEM agency.

Post-election hangover

Social Democracy lost the electoral duel with ODS and ended up on the second place. If we look at 2006 elections from a different angle, Social Democracy outshined the majority of their competitors with the way of leading its campaign. The party dictated main topics and dynamics of the 2006 campaign and therefore fundamentally influenced the political communication of its competitors.

At the close of the campaign, Social Democrats were taken aback by the “Kubice Affair”²⁴. It is difficult to speculate up to what extent this case influenced the result of elections. A greater importance for the electoral result had an underestimated theme with a strongly emotional feel – anti-communism. ODS stressed in the campaign that Social Democrats are willing to create the first electoral coalition with the Communist Party since 1989 in case of winning elections. With the help of media, it was possible to create a feeling that to vote is really a matter of principle. Thereto-corresponded high electoral attendance, reaching almost 65 percent. Elections therefore acquired an unprecedented attention in the Czech Republic. New was also the first Czech “get out the vote”²⁵ campaign under the name, “Decide it” or “To vote”.

Nevertheless, the situation did not get quiet after the elections. Immediately after the victory of ODS was announced. Paroubek organized a press conference and made a highly emotional statement about electoral results. He compared the victory of Civic Democrats to the February 1948 a historical moment, when communist seized the power. The situation was very bizarre, until this moment, he always acted as cold-blooded professional and he appeared on television screaming and attacking everybody. He did later excuse for his statement, anyway the population and media were alarmed.

The right wing ODS won with historically the highest score together with its potential coalition partners – Christian Democrats and Green Party it had exactly a hundred seats. The same number then had Social Democrats and Communists. Difficult and very long after-election negotiation that followed reminded slapstick at times.

Large coalition of all parties except KSCM was not possible also because of the strong animosity between ODS and ČSSD during the campaign. Therefore Topolánek carry on negotiations about minor and later coalition government of ODS, SZ and KDU-ČSL. Paroubek repeatedly claimed that he knows the receipt how to build the coalition. This situation was particularly difficult for Topolánek in creating the government. Paroubek was very strongly commanding the media attention and repeatedly stressing the Topolánek cannot succeed in making the government and he is not competent to be the prime minister. The public become very disappointing. ČSSD blocked coalition negotiations several times and managed to push into the programme points of the government their own points and prevent some of the planned reforms (Havlík – Foltýn 2006: 188-196)

What was extremely interesting about the whole process was the way that Paroubek managed to

²⁴ The published police report should prove the linkage of the ČSSD leaders to organized crime. The most attention was raised by making this report public a day before the elections.

²⁵ A group of film directors created the project. The aim of the campaign was to address a group of young non-voters in the age between 18 and 30 years. On the internet address, www.rozhodneteto.cz it was possible to download spots trying to explain in a humorous way that it is important to vote.

control the negotiations. He again and again repeated, he is the only one capable of building functional government and therefore, he should lead the negotiations talks. To demonstrate the negotiations atmosphere, he even managed that one of this coalition talks was transmitted by Czech television.

The coalition government was put together no sooner than January 2007, almost eight months after the elections (the government got support thanks two MP from ČSSD, who were later expelled from the party)²⁶. The party currently announced its recession to the opposition, because it is not a member of the government coalition, further realization of programme points is complicated.

Post-election communication

Warnings about the condition of state economics were the first steps of the first Topolánek's coalition. The government was trying to persuade the citizens that the economic situation is alarming and it was caused by the social democrat cabinets. Ministry of Finance paid few ads in the biggest newspapers (MF Dnes, Lidové noviny, Hospodářské noviny²⁷) with the title "Information for the citizens of the Czech Republic about the state of public finances" (the ads were published on 22 September). The minister of finance Mr. Tlustý was instantly accused by ČSSD that he is lying and manipulating the data. Additionally he was criticized that he uses public money for paying advertisements and continues on campaigning against social democrats. The advertisements became hot public topic, not because of the information they presented but simple because this type of announcement was used for very first time. The content was later disputed even by the economic manager from the ministry Mr. Janota (MF Dnes, 29. 9. 2006. p. 1). He was quoted in the advertisement but he disagreed with its conclusions and repeatedly criticized the minister Tlustý, he was later repealed from his position. Shortly after this event, the first Topolánek government did not succeeded in the vote of confidence and another round of negotiations started.

It must be said the Topolánek himself as the prime minister is not the master of communication. He very often makes strong mistakes in communication with opponents²⁸ or journalist. After repeated critique and few very clumsy statements the media consultants recommended him sort of "media diet".

²⁶ It should be mentioned it was the second Topolánek government. The first one was appointed on the September 4, however the government has not obtained the confidence from the parliament and the coalition negotiations continued.

²⁷ The advertisement was printed as well in the daily Metropolitan Express (it is distributed only in Prague).

²⁸ Publicly known become his love affair with politician Lucie Talmanová and his separation from his wife. MPs from non-governmental parties were disturbed by his obscene gesture in the parliament (he raised his middle finger towards a group of MPs from opposition). He later excused himself and tried to explain it as a friendly gesture to his coalition partner Mr. Kalousek. One of his last media mistake was using German expression "es kommt der Tag" in the text message for journalist from Tabloid Šíp. This sequence relates to German Nazis politician Konrad Henlein (see MF Dnes, 13.4.2007, p. 3).

Very relevant problem represents for the new government controversial politician Jiří Čunek (KDU-ČSL), who was accused from being racist and involvement in corruption affair investigating by the police. Additional complication for the current government is its incapability to explain clearly the impact of proposed economical reforms. The government did not mention any negative effects on particular social segments. The reform was presented as the best solution for everybody. Therefore, Social democrats labelled the government as an alliance of rich people and they plan to peach the proposal at the Constitutional Court. They have only one aim – to undermine the position of governing ODS and make good starting point for the next campaign. For this purpose in June ČSSD published a short stitch-book named “40 factual reasons for saying no to the government” (ČSSD 2007b).

Another example of the governmental communication politics is the question of building the antiballistic base on the territory of the Czech Republic. Public opinion and opposition are mainly against the base and demands referenda. The government is not communicating with voters and deal directly with US officials. The opposition on the top with Paroubek is constantly using all those defects and creating the image of incompetent and brute government. In May, ČSSD even published a leaflet “100 days of scandals, mistakes, vulgarisms and obscurantism” (ČSSD 2007a). Topolánek does not communicate with media. Paroubek strategy is a converse. He is always ready to comment every problem and the party produces several press releases every day²⁹. Opposition, mainly ČSSD is trying to get the media attention whenever it is possible. The aim of this strategy is systematically build the image of “party for people”. One of the last “staging” was provoking again the vote of government’s confidence. It was obvious the opposition will not have demanded majority. The motivation was clear – to get the front pages of newspapers and headlines in the TV news (see Paroubek 2007).

Election Cycle Model and the Czech Republic – remarks for further research

Very clearly, the campaign has not finished with the election results. Social democrats are very serious about their role in the opposition. They systematically watch every mistake of the governmental coalition and wait for the moment to attack. Actors are creating or seeking their communications strategies, some are trying to avoid attack of their opponents.

Above introduced model, suggest three types’ communication strategies in the relations to the position of the actor in the system.

²⁹ The motivation is clear. Paroubek is working on image of a friendly omnipresent politician, who is ready to self-sacrifice for everybody. Unlike Topolánek, who is commenting only on important matters, his aim is to work on the image of a public official.

- (1) The government coalition communicates policies – e.g. criticism of “the heritage” from previous governments.
- (2) By joining the coalition, specific governing parties demonstrate the benefit of doing so.
- (3) Opposition attacks the government and tries to weaken its position in the public site.

In the Czech environment, we meet mainly the first and third strategy; the second is present only latently and relates to the communist party. If one of the little party will make coalition with ČSSD it will be depended on ODS or KSČM. Seeing the antipathy between members of ODS and ČSSD it is not possible to predict this option. The support from Communists is for the majority of parties unacceptable. Collaboration with KSČM would represent a precedent for further functioning of the party system. Considering the strong anticommunist mood in the society, it will not be very practical in the next elections. The governmental strategy of criticizing the previous cabinets appeared in the form of newspapers advertisement prepared by the Ministry of Finance, however they were perceived very negatively. Therefore, the government has stopped doing it. Later they were forced to fence the opposition attacks and explaining their own mistakes. From this point of view, it is possible to claim that the governmental communication strategies are not very successful. Mostly, they are explaining their own misunderstandings instead of presenting their own policies and success in the national or international level.

On the other side it must be said – opposition lead by ČSSD is very effective. It is not only about critique, Social democrats are also preparing for next election. Social democrats are highly professionalized party and its strategy and moves are based on recommendation from external consultants and from analysis of electoral market. The post-election follows fluently the election campaign. The same conclusion applies to ODS. The level of professionalization is quit high, but it seems the party is not using the tools of political marketing effectively.

Conclusion

The electoral campaign 2006 and the post electoral development bring many new aspects into the way of organization of the electoral competition and into the political contest. The greatest breakthrough in the campaign was actually the systematic use of political marketing and electoral market and voter analysis. It is possible to declare that there has been a revolution in using methods of political marketing in the Czech Republic. The most dynamic actors in the parliamentary elections were the Social democrats who with the style of their campaign changed the view on organization and comprehension of the electoral campaign.

The campaign 2006 was exceptional because of not only the level of professionalization, the

intensity and usage of negative marketing and advertisement was very significant. The whole election race was reduced to a very personalized conflict between ODS and ČSSD. This battle of the two most important actors in the political system can anticipate further development of campaigning. The professional parties will compete with traditional.

Moreover the campaigns continue even after the elections. That is why we examine the whole process as the cycle. The recent political development shows that intensive communication between parties and voters continues. Unusually the permanent campaigning is more used by opposition not by governing parties.

All those tendencies and trends in the campaigning support proposed model. Clearly, it must be testing in the whole (and forthcoming) election period and the result should be compared. The model provides us with solid framework for further analysis and the next task will be to apply it and test it on another party political system.

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