

## **The Prospects of a Compromise Political Model in the Czech Republic after the 1998 Elections**

### **1. Electoral Results and Sociological Knowledge**

The results of democratic parliamentary elections are a behavioural phenomenon which can help verify, or disprove sociological knowledge concerning social processes, in this case the post-communist transformation. If the results are analysed in historical contexts as well as in their complex social and cultural contingency, from both quantitative and qualitative aspects, some interesting possibilities arise. They enable the researcher to evaluate the correctness of particular analyses and prognoses of metamorphoses of social structures, value orientations, attitudes to various social phenomena, and political orientations, as they were formulated before the elections. Through this prism it is possible to check, at least to some extent, the general theoretical and methodological prerequisites of these analyses and prognoses - of course only when confronted with other sources of information concerning historical social and political changes. Through sociological analysis of electoral results with reference to the previously accumulated knowledge we can, at the same time, highlight the post-election situation and gain valuable clues to the prospects of the social and political strategies in question, and thus contribute to new research and generalisations.

It is still in fresh memory of the Czech sociological community that in 1992 the majority of Czech sociologists shared a relatively unified view: namely, they forecast the dominance of a liberal democratic strategy and of a certain 'right-turn', in contrast to the still relatively left-leaning results of public opinion surveys conducted since the end of 1989. In the years 1991 - 1996, many papers and articles were published, differing in their conclusions and forecasts concerning the social and political future of Czech society. The authors of this paper belong to that group of sociologists to whom the results of the 1996 elections to the Chamber of Deputies of the Czech Parliament came as no surprise, signalling as they did the first signs of the ongoing turn to the left-centrist orientation. This was because we had already identified - on the basis of empirical research and theoretical considerations - the deepening of social differentiation and the possible ideological and political split of the population into two, approximately equal groupings holding different political orientations. [Machonin 1994]

In spite of the undoubted dexterity of the power elite of the newly established (at the beginning of 1993) Czech state, the 1996 elections only served to confirm that the Czech transformation is not an extraordinary process created 'from above' and essentially differing from the analogous processes taking place in the neighbouring countries of Central Europe, or from other gradual historical changes in democratic countries. (On the emergence of the historical gradualist approach to the post-communist changes see [Stark 1992; Offe 1991, 1992; Machonin 1992.]) Relatively soon after the re-establishment of the right-of-centre governing coalition in 1996 an increasing number of new economic and social difficulties appeared which demonstrated that the most important problems of the societal transformation

had, in the first, more successful period of the transformation, only been postponed, and that the account for the main part of its social costs had yet to be settled. (We locate the turning point between this first, and the subsequent, less successful period in the year 1995. In one of our surveys in the summer of this year, for the first time, we found that the number of people declaring themselves better off than they were before 1989 was nearly equal to the number of those holding the contrary view (see [Machonin, Tuèek, Gatnar 1995]). In 1997, public opinion polls provided increasingly clearer signals of a continuing shift in attitudes among part of the population towards social democratic concepts of post-communist change. Some liberally oriented sociologists, economists, and political scientists reacted to these processes by adopting a more critical approach to the neo-conservative right-wing policy and by developing more modern liberal ideas. Among sociologists, a pioneering role in this direction was played by the book *Markets and People* written by J. Veèerník [1996]. At the same time, the historical and gradualist sociological orientation in sociology, strengthened by non-conformist declarations of economists belonging to various schools, but mainly to the institutional and ethical one [Mlèoch 1997], turned attention to the increasing modernisation deficit of the Czech transformation and to the further deepening of social differentiation. Authors inclined towards this orientation continued to criticise the relative decrease in incomes and social statuses of both higher and lower professional employees whose incomes derived from the state budget. They predicted a further strengthening of the influence of the democratic left putting it on a par, in terms of electoral strength, with the neo-conservative right-wing forces. They also stressed the narrowing of economic limits and the emergence of quite new combinations of different social and political strategies, that is, the possibility of the model of a compromise solution to the 'stalemate' political situation (compare [Machonin 1994, 1996, Machonin, Š□astnová et al. 1996]).

The stormy political period between November 1997 and June 1998 led to some structural changes in the party political system and a series of abrupt changes in voting preferences. For these reasons, the results of the elections to the Chamber of Deputies of the Czech Parliament were eagerly awaited by sociologists engaged in the study of societal transformation, since they could contribute to verify, or refuting the various developmental hypotheses.

## **2. Empirical Basis**

Besides the results of the elections to the Chamber of Deputies of the Czech Parliament in 1996 and 1998, we used data collected by the Institute of Public Opinion Polling for the Sociological Institute of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic (Social Transformation and Modernisation research team). The main source was a common post-electoral survey conducted by both these institutes. This was carried out between 1st and 8th July 1998 on a sample of 2,035 respondents from the population of eligible voters. In this survey, several both objective and subjective identifications were applied which are not regularly used in public opinion polls. This relatively large sample was created using quota selection. This guarantees the representativity according gender, age, education, region and number of inhabitants in the locality. Of course, quota-sampling somewhat lowers the exactness of the acquired information. However, the problems of numerous refusals endangering the representativity of the sample connected with random selection are satisfactorily avoided in this way. Having a sufficient size of sample, the researchers were able to present on the base of quota-sampling a quite accurate picture of the structure of the

characteristics of the groups of voters supporting individual parties, mainly the supporters of the Czech Social Democratic Party (ÈSSD) and the Civil Democratic Party (ODS). Moreover, the group of non-voters was sufficiently represented. This kind of sample facilitates complex multivariation analyses, the results of which - as in all sociological surveys - create only a probabilist quantification of the studied processes and structures and do not present an unambiguous explanation of the studied phenomena. They are subject of further falsification, or verification by newly acquired knowledge, especially that based on new historical developments reflected by fresh empirical data. In this sense also our interpretations are open to critical discussion.

### **3. The Main Question**

The elections 1998 were earlier than if the government had served out its allotted term of office, which means that they were extraordinary. They were prepared by an interim government that was not formed on the basis of the results of the 1996 elections. This character signalled that the results might be influenced by many unusual factors. And certainly, in the six months running up to polling day there were attempts to restructure the political scene suddenly and rapidly, hectic activity from newly established parties and counter-activities from the traditional political parties, many scandals of assorted kinds and intensive media campaigns. The results of public opinion polls revealed sudden and essential shifts of preferences between traditional, revitalised and newly created political subjects. The post-electoral survey showed that as many as 44 % of voters decided on their chosen party only a few weeks before the elections, most of whom - 37 % of all voters - made up their minds only days before, or even at the last moment.

Thus, there arises here a quite legitimate question, if the final results of the elections were more influenced by the long-term workings of deep-rooted factors, as a component of a developmental trajectory, or rather by recently emerged factors of a temporary and accidental character. In other words: were they once again 'surprising' and, eventually, 'frustrating' as the results from 1996 were perceived by some sociologists and political scientists? During the course of collecting data for the post-electoral survey, the first reports of a modus vivendi agreement between the two major political parties - the left-centrist ÈSSD and right-wing oriented ODS - appeared. It was one of the possible compromise solutions to the continuing stalemate situation, which soon after having been reported was actually signed and has been in effect up until now. Was this unexpected event the result of a fortuitous improvisation exclusively, or did it at least partly correspond to some aspects of long-term trends and deeply rooted characteristics and attitudes of the population? In a summarised formulation: did the next step of social and political change as started by the 1998 elections testify rather to a historical and gradualist, or elitist and transitologist approach to post-communist societal change as these two theoretical and methodological concepts were confronted in the European and American sociology and political science in the first phase of the post-communist societal changes? (The confrontation of these two approaches still survives in various approaches of many authors applying theory of transition from totalitarian system to democracy and from command to market economy and those identifying themselves as adherents of the path-dependency and, eventually, modernisation theory, though the original sharp controversy has somewhat moderated under the influence of the observed actually ongoing processes especially in East Central European countries.) It must be understood, of course, that our

survey brought data from only a short historical period and that it could therefore contribute to only a partial verification or refutation of one of the two significant hypotheses, valid only for the given period. The same general hypotheses must be, of course, empirically falsified, or verified in the light of all subsequent economic, social and political events.

The basic structure of political parties represented in the Chamber of Deputies according to the size of their electoral support changed in 1998, as compared with 1996, the most significant aspect of which was a large increase in votes for Social Democracy (ÈSSD) and by a small relative increase in support for the Communists (KSÈM). This pushed the political balance in favour of left-wing forces from 36.8 % to 43.3 %. The centrist party, the Christian Democratic Union – People's Party (KDU-ÈSL), trying simultaneously to reach a coalition with the democratic left and with some forces on the right, and also perceived by public as centrist, somewhat improved its position to 9 %. On the right-wing a new political subject emerged – the Freedom Union (US). This party both objectively, and to some extent also subjectively, replaced in the eyes of the voters the former second right-wing party, the Civil Democratic Alliance (ODA), which was nearly bankrupt before the elections. However, it should be noted that the US came with some new, more modern elements in its programme, among others with stress laid on the issue of the middle strata. The party of the radical nationalist right – the Republicans – lost half of its support and failed to breach the threshold for representation in Parliament. The final total of right-wing votes, as represented in the Chamber of Deputies, thus decreased from 44 % to 36.3 %. It should be noted that the originally neo-conservative and clearly right-oriented major civil party – the Civil Democratic Party (ODS) to some degree changed its behaviour and – in contradiction to its own pre-electoral 'mobilising' rhetorics – made possible the formation of a social democratic minority government created by the Social Democracy. (In the Czech case, Social Democracy is a historical, traditional party, not a post-communist political formation as there is the case in other European post-communist countries.) Regardless of the pressures which led the ODS to this step, this means that the main right-wing political party acknowledged, as a matter of fact, the legitimacy of left-centrist democratic policy as a component of the current course of the Czech transformation. This happened in the interest of stabilising Czech society. This decision signifies that the ODS has shifted – along European lines – to the position of a rather moderate right-wing party. (However, in the course of the July 1998 elections, it was still perceived by the voters as being more rightist than the US.) An analogous shift to a moderate left-wing position was accomplished by the ÈSSD after the elections 1996, when it tolerated the – at first, also minority – government of the right-of-centre coalition. The ÈSSD as the winner of the 1998 elections also declared their willingness to accept some other variants of a compromise with the democratic right-of-centre and right-wing parties. One of these parties, the US, after some hesitation, finally refused the possibility to join the centrist government because of the participation of Social Democracy.

On the whole, the elections led to a certain increase of social and power influence to the left-of-centre party and to a mild turn to the left and, especially, to centrist positions. This had been foreseen by sober analysts in advance – at the latest, in the connection with the 'economic packages' of the right-wing government in 1996 and 1997. At the same time, the tension between the major left- and right-of-centre parties relaxed as a result of agreement on mutual tolerance and acknowledgement of the legitimacy of both neo-liberal and social democratic strategies of post-communist transformation, though still understood as controversial from the programme point of view.

With all this in mind, one might suppose that the radical political activities in the period between November 1997 and late spring 1998 had no deep and long-lasting consequences in social and political relationships and their further developments. In principle, the electoral results in June 1998 continued the general gradual trajectory of shifts in preferences in favour of the main political parties from the year 1994 to October 1997. Thus the electoral results confirmed rather the validity of the gradualist hypotheses. These included, as explained above, as one of the eventualities a certain combination of the strongest left- and right-wing liberal democratic strategies. The further empirical material presented in this paper should either verify, or disprove such a picture by a more profound analysis of factors that influenced the elections results.

#### **4. Factors Which Influenced the Differentiation of Electoral Support for the Parliamentary Parties**

In order to find out the structure of factors influencing the voting behaviour statistical models are often used with a dichotomous dependent variable, most usually the division of voters oriented to the left, or right. The definition and operationalisation of this dichotomy meets with substantial difficulties, particularly when applied to societies with only a short tradition of recently restored democratic elections. In the post-communist countries, including the Czech Republic, the main problem consists in the widespread discreditation of the left-wing orientation by peoples' bad experience with the communist social and political system. It is enough to point out that in our case nearly one half of Social Democratic voters declared themselves to be centrists, 30 % as belonging to the left-of-centre orientation, and only 7 % as belonging to the left. It is in this respect that the social democratic electorate differs essentially from the communist one. Analogous problems exist concerning the assumed right-wing orientation of the rather centrist KDU-ÈSL. Even in the case of the ODS and US, the voters distinguish these parties as far as the degree of their right-wing orientation is concerned. All this shows that the reduction of the dependent variable to the left-right dichotomy leads to an essential loss of information, mainly as regards the increasing role of centrist voters and the complex structure of their attitudes. When using the dichotomous dependent variable, the left-wing orientation is heterogeneous because it includes both communist, democratic socialist and social democratic orientations, while the right-wing orientation is created by the mixture of the support for the rather centrist Christian Democracy and the actually right-wing neoliberal parties.

For this reason, we decided to look for factors influencing electoral decisions along the whole ordinal scale 'left – left-of-center – center – right-of-center – right'. It was empirically verified that at the moment of data collection, i.e. also at the moment of the elections, this scale corresponded to the following ordinal range of the five newly elected political parties: KSÈM – ÈSSD – KDU-ÈSL – US – ODS. Among the instruments suitable for the solution of this type of task, given the present state of the available software equipment, the procedure of categorical regression (CATREG)[Manual SPSS Categories 8.0] seemed to be the most useful. It firstly brings lucid results, secondly enables the optimal determination of the intervals between the categories from the point of view of the maximal exhausting of variance, and thirdly it makes possible the control of ordinalisation of the originally nominal independent variables like social self-ranking.

Several introductory regression analyses, encompassing all accessible determinants of voting behaviour showed that the strongest factor influencing the decisions of voters was their personal political life tradition, represented in this case by their repeated voting for the same party in both 1996 and 1998 elections. Approximately two-thirds of voters who took part in both these polls remained faithful to their first decision. The most resolute were the voters of KSÈM and ÈSSD, closely followed by KDU-ÈSL voters. ODS lost more than 40 % of its electorate, while the US as a new party obtained its electorate mainly from the former voters of other parties. From the faithful voters of ÈSSD and KDU-ÈSL no more than one-fifth made their final decision in May 1998 or later on; among the Communist voters only one-tenth did so; among the supporters of ODS it was as high as a third. The main source of the rapid changes in political preferences immediately before the elections were to be found among the former ODS voters, the new US voters (more than four-fifths of them made their decisions in May or later) and the new voters of ÈSSD, ODS and KDU-ÈSL. Leaving aside those were voting for the first time, the it also concerned the former ODA (Civil Democratic Association) as well as the temporary sympathisers of US, who finally voted for ODS. Also, a section of the new Social Democratic voters who formerly supported other parties and, particularly, DŽJ (Pensioners for Life Security, changed their decision at the last minute.

In order to discover the more deeply rooted factors that as a whole influenced the election results, which in the end proved to be rather different than those from 1996, it was necessary to exclude loyalty to the same political subject from the list of independent variables, though this led to some decrease of the percentage of exhausted variance. Among the important independent variables remained the objective characteristics of age, education, social self-ranking and standard of living. Taken into consideration were also the evaluation of the post-communist transformation, the evaluation of the last two years development which incorporated the recent experience of the respondents, and the more general social values orientation. From 14 selected variables 5 were excluded as doubling some others (among them 'achieved education' as doubling the stronger influence of 'social self-ranking' – one of partial proofs of how far the Czech social differentiation still is from the meritocratic ideal). The remaining 9 variables were to represent the factors assumed to have influenced the election of the parties to the Chamber of Deputies arranged from left to right. They express both the objective characteristics, including social and economic ones, and the social value orientations as well as recently developed attitudes towards the present day situation in the country.

To test this model, the mentioned variant of the regression analysis CATREG was used. The selected variables were either cardinal (age), ordinal, or, eventually, correctly ordinalised. The described advantages of the used procedure were confirmed by a clear-cut increase of the value of the adj.  $R^2$  as compared with the linear regressions. The regression analysis was applied to the sample of voters of only those parties which finally entered the Chamber of Deputies. The arguments in favour of this decision were: the high dispersion of votes for small parties, the difficulty of ordinalisation of the higher number of badly identifiable parties and, finally, the significance of sufficiently concentrated voting for the creation of a functioning Parliament and political system as a whole. One of the interesting results of the application of the CATREG procedure became the prolonging of the distance between the communist and social democratic voters and the getting closer of the right-wing oriented US and ODS voters from the point of view of the distribution of the applied independent variables.

In the following regression analyses the values of standard error, as a rule, do not exceed 0.03. Where they do, the value is given under the table. Besides the regression coefficient 'Beta', the columns 'Zero-order' inform the reader about the values of the correlations of the transformed independent variables with the transformed dependent variable and the columns 'Partial' about the values of partial correlations of the independent variable in question with the dependent variable.

Table 1. shows the results of the regression analysis on the sample of voters of the parties represented in the Chamber of Deputies.

**Table 1. Results of the CATREG analysis on the sample of voters for the Parliamentary parties (N = 1,302) – adj. R<sup>2</sup> = 0.514**

Variable	Beta	Zero-order	Partial
Rapidity x sluggishness in the privatisation process	-,216	-,500	-,261
Influence of state x market on national economy	,189	,472	,234
Increase x decrease of freedom in the course of transformation	-,178	-,479	-,216
Social justification of transformation	-,167	-,516	-,190
Increase x decrease of standard of living in 1996-1998	-,103	-,416	-,123
Age	-,093	-,241	-,127
Standard of living – self-ranking	-,089	-,414	-,107
Social self-ranking	,081	,311	,106
Quality of functioning of economy 1996-1998	-,065	-,336	-,058

The attained level of explanation or predictability of voting behaviour – 51 % of exhausted variance – is, at first glance, relatively high, especially if we take into account the limited number of independent variables. In spite of this, it cannot be considered satisfactory. It awakens the suspicion that the computed structure of factors represents rather an average of several partial structures typical of more homogeneous subsamples.

For this reason, regression analyses were applied to three subsamples of: a) stable, i.e. faithful voters (48.8 % of those who supported the five parties which got into Parliament); b) people who did not vote in 1996, i.e. the first-time voters in 1998 (13,2 %); and c) those who changed their mind and voted for another party than in 1996 (38 %). The argument in favour of this was the hypothesis that just this kind of differentiation could be a very significant reason for the intrinsic heterogeneity of the relevant qualities of the participating population. This hypothesis was corroborated by the analyses presented in Table 2., mainly by the substantially lower exhaustion of variance in the case of those who changed their voting. Also the range and values of the Beta coefficients clearly differ in the three analysed subsamples.

**Table 2. Results of the CATREG analysis on the subsamples****a) 'Faithful' voters for the parliamentary parties (N = 732) - adj. R<sup>2</sup> = 0.584**

Variable	Beta	Zero-order	Partial
Rapidity x sluggishness in the privatisation process	-,232	-,566	-,205
Increase x decrease of freedom in the course of transformation	-,224	-,549	-,280
Influence of state x market on national economy	,201	,518	,173
Social justification of transformation	-,173	-,571	-,205
Social self-ranking	,099	,339	,134
Increase x decrease of standard of living in 1996-1998	-,077	-,447	-,099
Standard of living – self-ranking	-,076	-,433	-,099
Age	-,052	-,242	-,075
Quality of functioning of economy 1996-1998	-,050	-,347	-,070

**b) First-time voters for the parliamentary parties (N = 143) - adj. R<sup>2</sup> = 0.515\***

Variable	Beta	Zero-order	Partial
Rapidity x sluggishness in the privatisation process	-,194	-,416	-,253
Age	-,164	-,311	-,228
Social justification of transformation	-,162	-,461	-,202
Standard of living – self-ranking	-,159	-,427	-,203
Increase x decrease of freedom in the course of transformation	-,150	-,427	-,194
Increase x decrease of standard of living in 1996-1998	-,149	-,476	-,169
Quality of functioning of economy 1996-1998	-,138	-,326	-,179
Social self-ranking	,136	,261	,131
Influence of state x market on national economy	,133	,404	,172

\* Values of standard errors move in this case below and slightly above 0.07.

**c) Voters for parliamentary parties who changed their preferences as compared with 1996 (N = 427) - adj. R<sup>2</sup> = 0.405\***

Variable	Beta	Zero-order	Partial
Rapidity x sluggishness in the privatisation process	-,198	-,413	-,230
Influence of state x market on national economy	,175	,396	,204
Social justification of transformation	-,157	-,431	-,172
Increase x decrease of freedom in the course of transformation	-,144	-,405	-,164
Increase x decrease of standard of living in 1996-1998	-,123	-,323	-,139
Social self-ranking	,103	,305	,123
Age	-,093	-,231	-,116
Standard of living – self-ranking	-,085	-,342	-,097
Quality of functioning of economy 1996-1998	-,060	-,316	-,069

\* Values of standard errors do not exceed 0.043.



In consequence of the fact that the 'faithful' make up nearly half of the voters in question, the structure of factors typical for them also influenced the results for the whole sample. Among this subsample are represented more distinctly than for the average of the whole sample the voters of middle-age and the older generation, i.e. people who in one way or another participated in the political and social shifts connected with the 'Velvet Revolution' in 1989 and the liberalisation of the economy, and thus acquired important, but socially differentiated experience in the first, more successful period of the transformation. They divided their stable sympathies among ODS in 40 % of cases – these people probably belong, or are close to the so-called 'winners' of transformation – , ÈSSD – 30 %,and KDU-ÈSL and KSÈM – 15 % each. It is not surprising that these experienced and relatively active people adopted stable social value orientations in the issues of liberty, economic role of state and market and - to a somewhat lower extent of social justice (not surprising because of the prevalence of the right-wing orientation). The acquired various objective social statuses and fresh life experiences provided substantially lower influence on their behaviour than in the case of the two other subsamples, although they were probably not so different from what they had expected on the basis of the mentioned, also differentiated value orientations. It is therefore clear that one half of the voters decided in the elections in accordance with relatively firm and enduring social value orientations based on prolonged social experience. The high value of the exhausted variance, 58 %, expresses a high level of predictability of their voting behaviour. On the other hand, the higher average age means that the attitudes of this group will become weaker as time goes on.

The first-time voters differ from the average of voters, and particularly from the stable voters mainly by their lower age. Nearly half of them were under 25 when they went to the polls. However, among this group one can find many people of all other age categories, who, for various reasons, did not participate in the 1996 elections. That is why the age differentiation exhibited such a strong influence on their decisions. In other subsamples the distinct characteristics of the very young people did not work in such an intensive way. As far as the social self-ranking is concerned, it is understandable that among the newcomers we can find a higher representation of students or apprentices, but also of unemployed and a somewhat more distinct participation of unskilled workers. These biases cause the higher influence of social self-ranking. Interest in politics among this group is naturally low, below the average. As for political orientation, a pure centrist approach is more frequent than in the group of stable voters. The voting preferences manifested in the elections are not far from the average. One can only say, that the voting for ODS, KSÈM and KDU-ÈSL was somewhat under, and for US somewhat above average. The voting for Social Democracy was close to the average, which means that this party also won in this newly emerged subgroup. It is not surprising then that under these circumstances the regression analysis showed that the general evaluation of transformation and social value orientations did not affect electoral decisions with such intensity as in the subsample of the 'faithful'. Particularly interesting is the indifference of the first-voters to the ideological question of the state or market role in the national economy. On the other hand, they seem to be touched by the issue of social justice somewhat more than by the attained degree of freedom. The only exception among the social value orientations represents the attitude towards the controversial Czech 'rapid' privatisation, which seems to have been for everyone something of a symbol of the acceptance or rejection of the politics typical of the past phase of the transformation. On the other hand, a significant factor for the new voters, as compared with the stable ones, was the impact of the various attitudes towards the social justification of the transformation and the fresh experience with developments in

the standard of living. Besides all this, a relatively balanced pattern of the influence of all independent variables seems to be characteristic for this group. This is the consequence of the recent, not prolonged complex operation of all the factors on the inexperienced first-time voters. All these partial distinctions are interesting, corresponding to the age composition of the group and to the degree of their socialisation. They explain why 75% of first-time voters decided upon their electoral preferences only shortly before voting took place. However, the results of the regression analysis demonstrate that even in their case the decisions were not quite fortuitous and that their voting was in principle quite predictable from the historical-probabilist point of view. The evidence for this is the – higher than average – level of exhausted variance. 52 % is more than one could have expected for a group with such limited political experience.

The lowest exhaustion of variance was found in the regression analysis on the subsample of those who changed their minds and voted for another party than the one they chose in 1996. The only 40 % of explained voting behaviour means that the applied set of variables only partly fits the actual determinants and motivations of this very important group which, along with first-time voters, decisively contributed to the significant shifts in the electoral results between 1996 and 1998. In this case, rather the sequence of the determinants is important than the, as a rule substantially lower values of the coefficients. Thus somewhat higher than in the case of the stable voters are ranked the feelings of justification or not of social transformation, the recent experience with the changes in living standards, and the differentiation of social statuses. In spite of these partial comments, the explanation of the voting behaviour of the unstable voters needs some additional analysis.

## **5. The Mystery of the Group who Voted Differently in 1996 and 1998**

Taking into account that in this group there was a relatively high percentage of people who made their final decision only shortly before the act of voting (60.4 % as compared with 23,2 % among stable voters), one might imagine that it is the existence of just this kind of voting behaviour that could work in favour of the hypothesis that the results of the 1998 elections were caused by abrupt and fortuitous circumstances. Whether this was the case or not can only be decided after a more detailed sociological analysis of this section of voters.

The age structure of these people is somewhat curious. There are few people under 25 among them, but a clear over-representation of people from the younger middle generation (44 % between 25 - 44). At the same time, the same share of the older age group is present here as in the group of stable voters (27 %). The 'new' younger-middle aged generation is concerned here, not those people who participated in the shifts during and after the Velvet Revolution. They have more experience with the second, less successful phase of the transformation. They more frequently have dependent children in their families than the members of other groups in question – in 46 % of families. All social categories are represented here with some biases in favour of both higher and lower professionals and skilled workers (i.e. of all the middle categories of employees), however also of not working pensioners, women at home and the unemployed. Close to the average is the share of small-scale self-employed entrepreneurs with no more than two employees. Of people who changed their voting behaviour in the 1998 election, 45.8 % declared a bad or very bad standard of living in their households (as compared with 36.7 % in the group of stable voters). Present in this group are moderately above average numbers of people employed in education, health-care and public

administration. Nearly two-thirds of the members of this group stress the decrease in standard of living in society over the past two years, almost 60 % the deterioration in the field of social policy, and three quarters emphasise the worsening of the economy.

The most important trait of these people seems to be the fact that when ranking themselves on the left-right scale 58.3 % identify themselves with the centre, or right-of-centre position, and 72.8 % between the positions from left-of-centre to right-of-centre ( as compared with 59.1% of stable voters). In general, we can say that these shifting voters belong to a group with a strong share of people from the middle strata, the younger middle generation and families with children, but also of retired people. The common characteristic of these people is that most of them have experienced a decrease rather than an increase in standard of living. At the same time they did not cease to identify themselves with the political centre, more often the 'pure' centrists and right-of-centre, and to a lower extent also those feeling themselves to be left-of-centre. In other words, the subject of our analysis is the well-known 'centrist voter', vacillating between a right-wing government and the moderate democratic opposition according to the actual deterioration or improvement of the economic and social situation, according to his feelings of satisfaction or frustration from the point of view of previous expectations.

The objective existence of a relatively large group of such people is a generally accepted fact. A large majority of these people declare themselves in social self-ranking to belong to the middle strata. In the course of the first half of 1996, Czech sociology was presented with two different concepts of the political behaviour of this group. According to one, the numerous 'subjective' middle strata were a guarantee of the stability of the right-oriented political system. The second turned attention to the gradual worsening of the social situation of large parts of the objectively determined middle strata (mainly the employees whose income was derived from the state budget sphere) and predicted the tendency towards them changing their voting behaviour. (See [Machonin 1996].)

In the 1998 elections, the group characterised by a change of voting preferences was divided according their support for the individual parties as follows: KSÈM 5.1 %, ÈSSD 44.3 %, KDU-ÈSL 11.1 %, US 29.2 %, ODS 10.2 %. ( Social Democracy attracted the votes of mainly the former voters of ODS and of the extreme populist Republican Party, KDU-ÈSL also gained some ODS voters and a minor group of people previously supporting the Social Democrats, the US captured mainly the voters of ODS and ODA and another minor group of social Democratic voters, and ODS attracted a part of former ODA voters. The share of voters who moved to the Communists was negligible.)

The main flow of these shifts moved in the direction the winners of the elections – Social Democracy. In this stream there was also a strong representation of people with a negative experience with the transformation, 71.3 % of who believed that 'people like them' were currently worse-off than before November 1989. (Among the Communist voters the share of people dissatisfied with the change rises to 91.3 %, among the sympathisers of KDU-ÈSL it is 39.6 %, of ODS 21.4 % and of US 17.8 %.) Some subjective statements of the ODS and US supporters testify that these parties also attracted new voters from a group of people who in the course of transformation and, especially, over the previous two years had been successful.

The most substantial finding, however, is that the subsample of those who changed their voting is even in these basic social characteristics far less differentiated according to their present sympathies for individual political parties than is the case with the stable voters. It

includes significantly fewer persons with the extreme characteristics of 'winners' or 'losers' in the realised course of transformation to date. In spite of the differences concerning both the general evaluation of transformation and the relatively higher social successfulness of the voters of various political parties, the subsample of people who changed their minds is far more homogeneous than the subsample of the 'faithful' voters: objectively by their rather medium social positions and subjectively by their (on average lower) satisfaction with the developments over the preceding two years.

In all the questions concerning the basic social values and general political orientations, the differentiation in attitudes according to voting for particular political parties is significantly lower in this group than in the case of the stable voters, as demonstrated by the values of ordinal correlation coefficients. The clearest example of the moderation of differentiations of this kind is the self-ranking on the scale of left – centre – right political orientation.

**Table 3. Voters of parliamentary parties in 1998 who changed their preferences as compared with 1996 according to their left – centre – right political orientation in percentages (RS = 0.52)**

Party	P o l i t i c a l o r i e n t a t i o n					Total
	Left	Left-of-centre	Centre	Right-of-centre	Right	
KSČM*	35,0	50,0	10,0	5,0	0,0	100,0
ČSSD	4,2	25,9	54,5	10,6	4,8	100,0
KDU-ČSL	2,2	6,5	41,3	32,6	17,4	100,0
US	0,8	2,3	21,1	37,5	38,3	100,0
ODS	0,0	4,3	15,2	34,9	45,6	100,0
Total	10,2	15,2	32,2	20,2	22,2	100,0

\* Statistically insignificant

In spite of the fact that differences in political orientations between the Social Democratic electorate and the supporters of both the right-wing parties apparently do exist, one cannot ignore that the centrist orientation as a whole encompasses 91 % of the voters of ČSSD and the following shares of those who elected the centrist and right-wing parties: 80.4 % of KDU-ČSL, 60.9 % of US, and 54.4 % of ODS. Among the stable voters the analogous percentages are 86.5 % for ČSSD, 88.6 % for the traditionally centrist KDU-ČSL, but only 39.8 % for ODS! The connecting characteristic of all those who changed their voting is the prevailing centrist orientation. The stable voters, especially the right-oriented, are characterised – with the exception of the KDU-ČSL – rather by a strong clear-cut and, sometimes, extreme political orientation. Among the ODS electorate a clear right-wing orientation prevails (57.6 %).

Analogous phenomena connecting the right and left in the group of voters who changed their preferences can be observed in the quite new critical view of the ODS and US electorate on the developments over the previous two years. A significant convergence of outlooks is also visible in social values orientations. Thus in the question of the role of the state versus the market in the national economy, the new ČSSD voters support the rather pro-state and neutral attitude in a proportion of 72.3 %, while the similar new voters of the KDU-ČSL, US and

ODS take the same attitudes in 64 %, 59.1 % and 52.2 %. Instead of the former sharp confrontation between ideological outlooks, which still survive among the 'faithful', the data demonstrate a clear-cut tendency towards mitigating the differences on the part of right-wing voters by acknowledging the important role of state. The relation of this tendency to the increasing critical attitude towards the results of the 'liberal' developments of the national economy is obvious. It is highly interesting that the tendency to abandon the extremal and strong support of 'pure' or nearly pure liberalism in economy in favour of more intensive preferences of moderate state interventionism can be proved on comparative data from 1995 and 1998 for the adult population as a whole.

Leaving aside the minorities of those citizens who changed their voting to the left because of becoming poor and those who did so in favour of the right-wing parties because of having been successful in the transformation processes, it can be asserted that a clear majority of those who voted otherwise than in 1996 are centrist voters. In voting, they were following their experience of a deterioration in their living standards. One part sought an improvement in voting for another right-wing party – i.e. mainly the new and somewhat indistinct US. Most chose the ÈSSD, and a small minority the centrist KDU-ÈSL. At the same time, voters in this category keep their objective social positions and to a high extent also their evaluations and orientations, more or less verified by experience. The outcome of this is the fact that new decisions, and the new voting differentiation, do not correspond with their social statuses and with their formerly adopted basic orientations to such an extent that was typical for the stable voters. It is true that such a process causes some confusion in the application of regression analysis. However, it is quite understandable as a consequence of a) the new tendency in the Czech transformation passing from its relatively successful phase to a relatively unsuccessful one and b) the objective deterioration of the well-being not only of the lower, but also of a part of the middle strata. The status inconsistency as well as the inconsistency in outlooks, attitudes and preferences is hard to capture using standard statistical methods. It is, however, a really existing, not ephemeral phenomenon, and one of the important sources of the social and political changes. The lower extent of the statistical determination of political preferences among those who voted in 1998 otherwise than in 1996 is therefore in no case the proof of the fortuity of their behaviour. It was caused by social inconsistencies which emerged as a consequence of historical shifts in society and in the minds and behaviour of their actors. From this perspective it is sufficiently explainable as a component of the objective social dynamics anchored in well described situations.

## **6. Conclusion: Factors Influencing Voting Behaviour**

Returning now to Table 1., i.e. to the results of the regression analysis for the sample as a whole, we can state that it quite adequately reflects the factors which decidedly influenced stable voters and the first-time voters, that is, the majority of election participants. It does not offer an exact picture of those phenomena which caused the change in voting behaviour between 1996 and 1998 typical of a non-negligible part of the population.

Among the factors which actually influenced the general results of the elections two have outstanding significance. It is a) the strong or faint inclination to the liberal or etatist social value orientation and b) the evaluation of the two key processes of the transformation since 1989: the relatively successful democratisation and the – in the eyes of the respondents not as

successful – solution to the issue of their social justification. Furthermore, especially among first-time voters and those who changed their electoral preferences, an important role was played by c) the recent experience of the two years preceding the elections. The bearers of the change in electoral results between 1996 and 1998 - the first-voters and those who changed their minds - both reacted on the deterioration of the economic situation. At the same time, they were significantly more centre-oriented than the traditional stable voters. This goes mainly for the self-ranking on the left-centre-right scale and for the attitudes to the economic role of state or market. The change in electoral preferences was clearly connected with the new historical experience brought by the second, less successful phase of the post-communist transformation. All this is in a way connected with d) the social status and standard of living of respondents as they perceived it. Nor must one abstract from e) the generation dimension, as it is closely connected with the process of acquiring experience, especially with the coming economic recession. As shown by the partial correlations, all the variables stressed under a) - d) belong to significant determinants of the voting behaviour expressed by preferences for the parliamentary political parties in the electoral act. The long-term experience with societal transformation as a whole, social values orientations as the consequence of both experience and the cultural (ideological) influences, 'fresh' social experience, and the acquired both collective and individual social status as the result of the experience of the respondents all amalgamate in the consciousness of people in the differentiated decisions to give support to a particular political subject. The voting behaviour described in this way, could not, of course, be fully explained by means of a disposable set of variables. Mainly, both individual and social psychological factors, as well as marginal cultural and social factors could not be used for the explanation of the voting behaviour, especially of those who changed their preferences. However, in general, the achieved level of explanation is quite sufficient for the statement that the studied act of voting behaviour cannot be understood as a consequence of fortuitous effects and influences that emerged suddenly in connection with the last half a year political activities. It is much more understandable as the result of the structured influence of relatively enduring historical processes. A good test of this conclusion is the return of the temporary sympathisers of the DŽJ and US to the stables of ĚSSD and ODS as well-trying and tested political parties.

All the steps of our empirical analyses lead to the conclusion that the June 1998 electoral results were certainly influenced by the political crisis of 1997/1998. (The most important events in this connection were: firstly the substitution of the unreliable ODA by the more dynamic and, in some regards, modernised variant of right-wing liberalism offered by US, and secondly the [unintended by the initiators of the crisis] revitalisation of the ODS and its shift to a moderate right-of-centre position and limited co-operation with Social Democracy.) However, the final influence of these activities and of the political crisis as a whole was far weaker than one could suppose in certain moments of development, for example, in March 1998. All this did not hinder the progression of the long-term ongoing socially and culturally grounded trend towards a turn in voting preferences and the whole social and political system to the centre and democratic left. Quite the opposite happened. The ODS was compelled to accelerate its post-election turn which had been maturing already before the elections as the consequence of previous failures and the changing moods of centrist voters. In doing this, it had to assist the democratic left in taking power. Even the assertion of another variant of political solution could not be based on a renewed total isolation of the democratic left. A certain level of political compromise and agreed minimums of commonly accepted principles look set to remain for a foreseeable time one of the constitutive elements of the Czech political scene.

Although the political scene of the Czech Republic under the minority left-of-centre government still remains close to what we called stale-mate situation, the basic arrangement created after the elections in June 1998 has not changed. The two big parties keep their agreement. This is a stable subject of sharp criticism of the three smaller parties, supported by most of the mass-media and highly active in both chambers of the Parliament. However the ČSSD and ODS are still heading the field in political preferences and the political system is functioning without catastrophes. Particularly symptomatic is the fact that one of the first steps of the new government was a mild improvement of the salaries in the branches depending from the state budget. It is, of course, possible that unexpected international events or further developments of the progressing economic recession and attending it social tensions can cause new conflictual situations with not quite predictable consequences. This could give chances for some more radical and authoritarian solutions of the situation in the Czech Republic, closer to the transitsological and elitist images than to the relatively quiet, compromise and consensual approaches which prevail for the time being.

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