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## The Quality of Democracy in the Czech Republic

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## **Abstract**

The main aim of the paper is to assess the quality of democracy in the Czech Republic. The functioning of the Czech democracy is evaluated according to the international comparative methodology - Bertelsmann Transformation Index (BTI). This method has allowed the authors to analyse the democratic processes in the Czech Republic in terms of comparative and theoretically grounded criteria while at the same time contextualising the overall domestic development within the setting of Central and East European (CEE) and other 'new democracies'. The main stress is placed on the basic aspects of the quality of democracy in the Czech Republic in the CEE context and on its strengths and weaknesses. While the Czech Republic has developed a stable political system and institutions, as well as a clear separation of the individual institutions, it is still struggling to strengthen the relationship between the latter and the citizens. This fact can potentially endanger the legitimacy of the entire democratic order. Building social cohesion and elimination social exclusion are thus very important current issues. The last section contextualises Czech democracy within Central Europe and concludes that the Czech Republic is, despite various long-term problems, a classic consolidated democracy. Viability and legitimacy of democracy in the Czech Republic and Europe in general depends on the fostering of ties between the political elite and the citizens.

## **Keywords**

Benchmarking - Czech Republic - Democracy- Governance - Methodological Issues - Participation- Political Science



## Introduction

The main aim of this paper is to assess the quality of democracy in the Czech Republic. The functioning of the Czech democracy is evaluated according to the international comparative methodology – Bertelsmann Transformation Index (BTI). This method has allowed us to analyse democratic processes in the Czech Republic in terms of comparative and theoretically grounded criteria while at the same time contextualising the overall domestic development within the setting of Central and East European and other ‘new democracies’.

The opening section of this paper is an overview that characterises the institutional, political, economic and social transformation in the Czech Republic after the democratic changes of 1989, the break-up of Czechoslovakia, democratic consolidation, and until the first consequences of the Czech accession to the European Union. In the section dedicated to the evaluation of the quality of democracy in the Czech Republic, the main emphasis is placed on the last ten years and on the evaluation of the following criteria, which rely on the methodology and running assessments of the BTI: 1) political (stateness, political participation, rule of law, stability of democratic institutions, political and social integration), 2) economic (level of socioeconomic development, organisation of the market and competition, currency and price stability, private property protection, etc.), 3) management performance (societal consensus building, international cooperation, etc.), 4) trends in further development, and 5) strategic prospects.

The main focus is on the basic aspects of the quality of democracy in the Czech Republic and on its strengths and weaknesses. The last section contextualises Czech democracy within Central Europe. The conclusions of this paper are favourable regarding the quality of Czech democracy – the Czech Republic is a classic consolidated democracy. Despite various long-term problems that this paper draws attention to, the Czech Republic is still ranked first in 2008 among 125 assessed ‘new democracies’ in terms of the *Status Index* that evaluates the democratic development, consolidation of the democratic system and development of market economy (Bertelsmann Stiftung 2008b).

## Conception of democracy and measurement models

The concept of democracy has undergone many changes since its emergence. In this section, the aim is to draw attention to the necessity of combining theoretical and empirical studies of democracy.<sup>1</sup> In the Czech Republic, as in most of the countries around the world, the word democracy is not only commonplace in scholarly literature but also in the daily news. We often encounter democracy as a normative term of an ideal, which current governments either move closer to or away from. The questions on the quality of democracy and its measurement are thus very up-to-date. Scholarly literature on transitions and democratic consolidation only rarely emphasise the need for a normative and theoretically grounded definition of democracy. In this respect, a very important attempt to overcome this stalemate was the work of

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<sup>1</sup> For a concise and clear overview of the history and development of theories of democracy, see Dahl (2001).

Wolfgang Merkel, a German political scientist, who coined the terms 'embedded and defective democracies'.<sup>2</sup>

Merkel introduced his approach by an analysis and critical assessment of the democratic concepts by Schumpeter, Dahl and Przeworski. He argued that these authors provided only a limited insight as they prioritised the role of elites and left out the structural conditions of democracy. By contrast, Merkel brought other aspects, such as the rule of law, civil rights and horizontal accountability, into the concept of democracy (Merkel 2004; Merkel and Croissant 2004; Merkel 2007; cf. Schumpeter 1972: 269; Dahl 1975, 1989). Merkel incorporated not only the dimension of inputs – political participation, but also outputs – equality, social and political inclusion. In his view, democratic regimes are to be evaluated based on the following five criteria: 1) procedural effectiveness (rule-of-law); 2) accountability; 3) responsiveness of the elected representatives; 4) equality of political liberties and civil rights (citizenship); and 5) elimination of the socioeconomic inequalities.

The concepts of embedded and defective democracies are not only theoretical but also analytical. They were operationalised and further elaborated upon for the purposes of a wide-scale international comparative assessment – the BTI. Its aim is to provide researchers with an analytical tool to find answers to the following four questions: 1) What is a good and what is a defective democracy? 2) What are the structural and functional commonalities of defective democracies? 3) What are the causes and paths leading to the emergence of defective democracies? 4) How stable are defective democracies, and what trajectories can be expected for them in the future? (Merkel and Croissant 2004: 200).

According to Merkel, the quality of democracy needs to be determined by the procedures, content and outcomes of democratic governance. The core of the empirical analysis of democracy, integrated in the BTI, is the evaluation of the following five dimensions: 1) procedural – rule of law; 2) accountability; 3) responsiveness of the elected representatives to the impulses coming from the public; 4) implementation of new political liberties and civil rights; and 5) substantive integration of society – progressive reduction of social and economic inequalities.

Based on these five dimensions, effective and more or less defective democracies can be described and their defects recognised. Our contribution to the topic will rely on the above mentioned approach in order to assess some selected aspects of the effectiveness of Czech democracy, which at the same time will be set into a wider context of Central and Eastern Europe.

The following section will introduce some important indices of democracy measurement that will be compared with the BTI in order to justify its usage as our

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<sup>2</sup> It must be noted that the described typology refers to democracies only. Apart from democracies ranging from embedded to defective democracies, Merkel provides a description of autocracies. During the transition from autocratic regimes, defective democracies go through a relatively successful phase of institutionalization of political rights and free elections; however, the rule of law and the principle of horizontal accountability remain at a very rudimentary level. Another important aspect of defective democracies is the occurrence of relatively strong political actors and groups (the army in the case of Latin America, or the communist nomenklatura in the case of some post-communist countries in Eastern Europe) that assume important functions during democratization. The last aspect of defective democracies is the so-called *low-intensity citizenship* stemming from weak civil society.

main measurement instrument. Our main claim is that the concept of embedded democracy and its operationalisation in the BTI, which encompass both input and output aspects of democratic order, is the most suitable to evaluate the quality of democracy.

## Existing indices of democracy measurement

Before we move forward and explain the Bertelsmann Transformation Index, we shall first briefly present some existing indices that measure one or more of the five dimensions of Merkel's concept of democracy. To begin with, though, we shall answer the question of what is the purpose of indices of democracy and why they originate. The main goal of democracy indices is to comparatively evaluate and hierarchically list selected countries based on the chosen criteria. From the comparative perspective and using consistent methodology, the individual indices represent proxies for the partial assessment of the quality of democracy. The most widely used indices relevant to the chosen criteria are the following six: Freedom House Index (FHI); Worldwide Press Freedom Index; Index of Economic Freedom; Human Development Index (HDI); Gini Index, and The Worldwide Governance Indicators (WGI).

Probably the best-known index of democracy in terms of quantified assessment of the quality of democracy is the *Freedom in the World* annual report, or Freedom House Index, published by the American non-governmental organisation (NGO) Freedom House. It has been assessing the degree of freedom in the world since 1973 when Raymond Gastil published the first report. Freedom House defines democracy as electoral democracy whose main attributes are a competitive party system, universal adult suffrage, regularly contested elections, and the ability of elected representatives to communicate with the citizens and respond to their needs. The methodology of the index is based on analyses of democracy quality by country experts. The index encompasses indicators of political liberties and civil rights evaluated on a scale of 1 (most free) to 7 (least free). The individual operative factors of the index are: electoral process; civil society; independent media; good governance; national democratic governance; local democratic governance; judicial framework and independence; and corruption. The particular items on the expert checklist of the Freedom House have undergone some minor changes since 1973. Some recent changes are especially held significant given their impact on the overall evaluation. Between 2005 and 2006 there was a clear change in evaluating formal rather than substantial rights as well as a shift away from the emphasis on individual rights (Giannone 2010: 89-90). In regard to the five criteria of the quality of democracy the *Freedom of the World* index fully or partially assesses three criteria – procedural effectiveness, accountability and equality of political liberties and civil rights. Aside of not fully encompassing all five criteria, the methodology as well as the accuracy of this index is challenged (ibid.).

The *Worldwide Press Freedom Index* is another ranking, published by the international NGO Reporters Without Borders, which use approximately 130 correspondents to compile Index. The assessment is based on a questionnaire sent out to experts ranging from journalists, media reporters, researchers, lawyers and to human rights activists. The questionnaires include questions on direct attacks against the media as well as occurrences of other direct or indirect pressure exerted by politicians or the business on the freedom of press. However, due to the nature of the methodology that reflects

subjective evaluations of the respondents, there are some inconsistencies in the evaluations of individual countries over time. Aside of the methodological issues, the index only partially encompasses two of the five criteria of the quality of democracy – accountability and responsiveness.

The Heritage Foundation, a conservative American think-tank, in cooperation with The Wall Street Journal, publishes the annual *Index of Economic Freedom*. This research project relies on the definition of economic freedoms identical to the classical American laissez-faire capitalism. Among the key evaluated aspects are taxes (the lower, the better ranking) and state (similarly, the lower the influence of the state, the better the ranking). This index is one of the very few that presents a clear definition of economic freedom, which is understood as *an absence of coercion or constraint of production, distribution and consumption of goods and services by the government. The government interventions are not beyond the extent necessary for citizens to protect and maintain liberty itself.*<sup>3</sup> The index is very complex as it uses more than 50 variables (corruption, tariff rates, import quotas, tax rates, government expenditures, rule of law, effectiveness of jurisdiction, regulation, restrictions on labour market, informal market activities etc.) that are divided into ten main factors of economic freedom: business freedom; trade freedom; monetary freedom; government size; fiscal freedom; property rights; investment freedom; financial freedom; freedom from corruption; and labor freedom. The Index of Economic Freedom is thus an instrument that informs all actors in the market about the current economic situation, economic stability and degree of economic openness in countries across the world, and the categories are evaluated on a scale of five: free country, mostly free, moderately free, mostly unfree, and repressed. The methodological issue regarding the *Index of Economic Freedom* is the fact that it is partially a meta-index incorporating other data thus magnifying their possible inaccuracies, furthermore, it is not clear in what way the data is gathered and empirically elaborated (weighting, indexing etc.). In regard to the five criteria of the quality of democracy the *Index of Economic Freedom* partially relates to the following three criteria – procedural effectiveness, equality of political liberties and civil rights and elimination of the socioeconomic inequalities.

Another index – the *Human Development Index* – is a summary measure of human development and was devised by Amartya Sen, Mahbub ul Haq and other researchers in 1990. The United Nations Development Program (UNDP) relies on the HDI for its annual Human Development Report. However, this index has some restraints, which even one of its authors Amartya Sen regards critically (Sen 1998). The HDI is a standard worldwide comparative indicator used to evaluate the quality of life by the combination of the following factors: life expectancy, literacy, education, and standard of living. The index measures the average advances in a country in three dimensions of human development: 1) long and healthy life, as measured by life expectancy at birth; 2) knowledge, as measured by the adult literacy rate (with two-third weight) and the combined primary, secondary and tertiary gross enrolment ratio (with one-third weight); 3) decent standard of living, as measured by GDP per capita (PPP US\$). A complementary index to the HDI is the Index of Human Poverty that assesses the poverty of the UN member states. In regard to the five criteria of the quality of democracy the *Human Development Index* only partially assesses one criterion – the elimination of the socioeconomic inequalities. Aside of not fully

<sup>3</sup> Index of Economic Freedom 2009: 11-16, available at: <[http://www.heritage.org/index/PDF/2009/Index2009\\_Chapter1.pdf](http://www.heritage.org/index/PDF/2009/Index2009_Chapter1.pdf)>.



encompassing all five criteria, the methodology as well as accuracy of this index is challenged.

The next index we will reflect on is the *Gini Index*. The Gini Index was developed and made public by Corrado Gini, an Italian statistician, in 1912. It provides a coefficient of inequality in distribution of resources wages, property, etc. The index is defined as a ratio of values between 1 and 0. The main strengths of the index are its methodology and its broad applicability – not only for international comparative studies but also for comparative studies of regions in a country or changes over time. By contrast to GDP, the index highlights income inequalities between the rich and poor as well as on the relative stability of the proportion of population in between these two poles. The weakness of the index is, though, the fact that the index will indicate a higher value for countries with great regional discrepancies. Thus large regional income differences can overshadow the income differences between the rich and the poor. In contrast, this is not an issue with indexes, where every indicator is measured separately. For example, in the index of the European Union, member countries needs to be calculated separately and the final result aggregated in order to compare its value with e.g. the USA. For the sake of comparability, the subjects (individuals vs. households) need to be measured in an identical way. In regard to the five criteria of the quality of democracy the *GINI Index*, similar to *Human Development Index* only partially assesses one criterion – the elimination of the socioeconomic inequalities.

The last index to be mentioned here is the World Bank's index, *The Worldwide Governance Indicators*, that was developed by Daniel Kaufman, Art Kraay, Pablo Zoido-Lobaton in 1999, and later refined in cooperation with Massimo Mastruzzi. It is a meta-indicator measuring governance, or more specifically good governance. WGI analyses a country's performance for all available years between 1996 and 2008 in six dimensions of governance: 1) voice and accountability; 2) political stability and lack of violence – terrorism; 3) government effectiveness; 4) regulatory quality; 5) rule of law; and 6) control of corruption. The aggregate indicators combine the perceptions of a large number of enterprises, citizens and experts by the use of surveys and other assessments in industrial and developing countries. The individual data sources underlying the aggregate indicators are drawn from a diverse variety of survey institutes, think tanks, NGOs, and international organisations.<sup>4</sup> In regard to the five criteria of the quality of democracy the *The Worldwide Governance Indicators* index fully or partially assesses three criteria – procedural effectiveness, accountability and equality of political liberties and civil rights. Aside of not fully encompassing all five criteria of the quality of democracy the meta-character of the index represents an important methodological issue.

To conclude this section, it can be summarised that there are numerous ways of measuring and assessing the quality of democracy. The primary goal of most of the indices is a comparative analysis of some selected aspects of democracy. Despite the general and vague term 'indices of democracy', their focus is limited to only some selected aspects of democratic rule. The most common of these are elections, civil rights, free press and civil society. The majority of indices do not rely on any clearly defined theoretical concepts and thus face the methodological problems of intersubjectivity: the fundamental terms and categories are not clearly determined

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<sup>4</sup> Worldwide Governance Indicators, available at: <<http://info.worldbank.org/governance/wgi/index.asp>>, accessed 26.2.2010.

and the researchers' methodological approaches can thus vary across studied countries.

One of the most fundamental problems of the indices is their basic goal – the degree of generalisation and a presumption of a universal understanding of democracy. Nonetheless, as some recent studies have demonstrated (Muno et al. 2009), despite conceptual and methodological problems, the BTI, Freedom House and the World Bank's Index offer very useful tools for pursuing comparative studies of the current development in the European and global context. However, critical voices such as Merkel and Giannone point out yet another problem facing researchers when using the data provided by these various indices. These are, as Giannone puts it, 'political and ideological issues'. It is mainly the deep penetration of the (neo)liberal ideologies into the presumably impartial and normatively neutral scientific instruments for measuring democracy that leads to inconsistencies. On the example of the Freedom House, Giannone points out that the goal of many indexes is to scientifically legitimise the selected model of democracy and provide support for its advocates (Merkel 2004; Giannone 2010: 89-91). This caveat is not to claim that the indices are ideologically loaded and thus ought not to be used, but to highlight their methodological as well as ideological limitations.

Table 1 presents a summary of the key aspects of three of these indices. Based on the assessment of five criteria of the quality of democracy, the BTI clearly represents the most appropriate tool for measuring the quality of democracy, especially because it is transparent and theoretically grounded. The construction of BTI thus effectively limits the subjectivity of evaluation and further limitation includes a multilevel expert evaluation process. We will expand upon the basic aspects of BTI later. After the empirical evaluation of some annual rankings, it has become apparent that '[...] of all international rankings and ratings of democracy, the Bertelsmann Transformation Index provides the most reliable, transparent and differentiated data' (Merkel 2008: 15).

Table 1: Methodology of measuring democracy in a comparative perspective

	Freedom House Index	The World Bank's Index	BTI
Measurement methodology	Evaluation and classification	Meta-Index	Evaluation and classification
Selection of indicators	Unclear explanation	Unclear explanation	Theoretically grounded
Ability to differentiate	Partially overlapping indicators	Partially overlapping indicators	Partially overlapping indicators
Level of aggregation	Standard (unjustified)	Justified	Standard (unjustified)
Reliability	Limited	High	Rather high
Transparency	Insufficient	High	High

Source: Muno et al. 2009.

The next section will offer an explanation of how the Bertelsmann Transformation Index deals with these issues as its main goal is to overcome the existing indices of democracy measurement in terms of methodology and analytical approaches, and to offer a theoretical and empirically substantiated comparative analysis of the quality of democracy.

## The BTI – assessing the state of democracy

The first question to be raised in the introduction to this section is whether any assessment of democratic development is achievable. As we have tried to show in the introductory part, numerous models and schemes have emerged to achieve this goal. In our view, the most precise and useful model of assessing democracy is the BTI that has been assessed by critics and scholars as both theoretically and methodologically grounded tool (Merkel 2008). We share this opinion based on our personal experience with the usefulness of this model, which we have applied for a number of expert analyses in the Czech Republic, and which we rely on for the purposes of this study as well.

The Bertelsmann Foundation has been studying the transformation and development of democracy in cooperation with the Centre for Applied Policy Research (C.A.P.) at the University in Munich since 1996. The Foundation annually grants the Carl Bertelsmann award to any innovative and exemplary approach to the solution of socio-political problems. In 2001, the decision was made to award successful transformations and their management with the Carl Bertelsmann Prize ‘Shaping Change - Strategies of Transformation’. In order to determine the progress made by countries in transition, the committee designed criteria of quantitative comparative evaluations by the use of quantifiers.<sup>5</sup> After a reflexive evaluation of the experience in the research team and a due refinement, the criteria were used for the project of the Bertelsmann Transformation Index – first launched in 2003, then published in 2006 and thereafter on a bi-annual basis.<sup>6</sup> Although the methodology has undergone some minor changes, these have not been substantial and thus have not precluded comparative analyses over time.

How is the model framed and how does it secure for the degree of reliability and ability to differentiate between the studied countries? The BTI is a global index that analyses and evaluates the progress in democratic transformation and the quality of governance. The assessment the BTI uses stems from the study of consolidated democratic systems with market economies. The concept of consolidated democracies relies on multi-level conceptions in the *transitology* literature (Pridham 1995; Linz and Stepan 1996; Merkel 1998 and others).

As for the country evaluation process, the BTI is designed as a multi-level model that relies on expert analyses of the individual countries (two or three reports per country) in the first instance (see more details in Figure 1). As with the other indicators described above, the BTI thus also uses expert evaluations and can to a certain extent be influenced by the subjective attitudes of the evaluators (the process is multilevel and the individual evaluators are not allowed to have any contact between each other in an effort to achieve the highest possible objectivity). Therefore, in order to avoid the

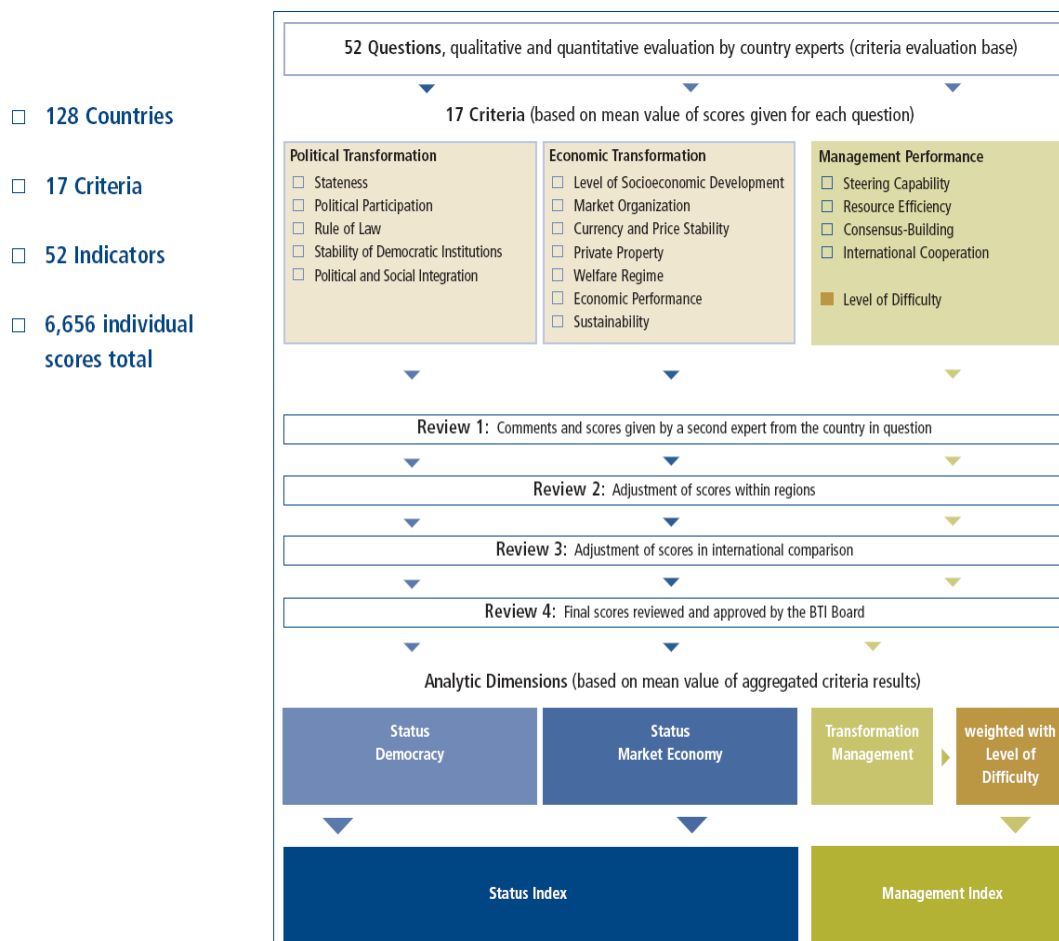
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<sup>5</sup> Comprehensive studies looked at 59 countries in the world, including the Czech Republic. However, the Czech Republic has not made it to the top ranking of successful transformations. It was Poland that was ranked first among post-communist countries. The award was granted to notable individuals from Bolivia and Poland for their exemplary work: Tadeusz Mazowiecki, Leszek Balcerowicz and Adam Michnik represented the successful transition process in Poland, and René Blattmann together with Ana Maria Romero de Campero stood for an excellent progress in Bolivia.

<sup>6</sup> The BTI 2003 evaluates the period of 1998-2002, the BTI 2006 the period of 2001-2005, the BTI 2008 the period of January 2005 – January 2007, and the BTI 2010 assesses the period of January 2007 – January 2009.

pitfalls of subjectivity, the BTI project have incorporated a number of steps and procedures for how to preclude such problems. The clear definitions of fundamental terms and concepts notwithstanding, the experts also receive a standardised list of criteria (coding manual), which they use to assess and ‘grade’ the particular countries. Another corrective aimed at solving the problem of intersubjectivity was the evaluation of the submitted reports supplemented by opinions of other experts, usually nationals of the analysed country. The third level of the research is a system of coordination within seven regions.<sup>7</sup> And as a final step, findings are reviewed comparatively across the regions.

Figure 1: Bertelsmann Transformation Index 2010



Source: Bertelsmann Stiftung 2010a.

The BTI measures the level of progress achieved in the countries<sup>8</sup> in transition towards democracy and effective market economy. Moreover, it also evaluates the quality of governance in terms of management capabilities regarding the above-described processes, effective use of existing sources, ability to create societal consensus and involvement in international cooperation. The BTI does not include countries with a consolidated and stable democratic system and a developed market

<sup>7</sup> For the purposes of the project, the regions are divided as follows: East-Central and Southeast Europe, Middle East and North Africa, CIS a Mongolia, Latin America and the Caribbean, West- and Central Africa, South- and East Africa, Asia and Oceania.

<sup>8</sup> The BTI 2003 evaluated 116 countries (BTI 2006 – 119, BTI 2008 – 125, and BTI 2010 – 128 countries).

economy – most of the OECD countries are thus excluded from its scope. Apart from some exceptions (e.g. Slovenia), countries with less than 3 million inhabitants were also excluded from the project. However, the foundation did not leave out the OECD countries for a very long time. In 2007, the BTI project, later renamed to *Sustainable Governance Indicator* (SGI), started to examine and compare also the OECD countries. The Czech Republic is now part of this project<sup>9</sup>. The findings have already been published (Bertelsmann Stiftung 2009) and we will come back to them later in this paper.

The global assessment of the quality of democracy, market economy and political leadership in transforming countries is based on the following normative framework: Firstly, any successful change contains an economic and political dimension; a comprehensive analysis thus needs to take both aspects into consideration. The combination of democracy and market economy is considered a key element for the future of the evaluated countries. Secondly, the process of development and transformation can be measured by the achieved progress on the path towards democracy, rule-of-law and socially responsible market economy. Finally, governance capability is crucial for successful reforms and a positive social change. It is possible to measure and compare the quality of political management.

The BTI aggregates a quantitative score of 58 indicators for every country (Bertelsmann Stiftung 2008b); moreover, the detailed studies of national experts also explain and justify each calculated score. The combination of qualitative data and qualitative expertise ensures for the most possible degree of evaluation transparency.<sup>10</sup> The outcomes of the evaluations are two comparative tables – *Status Index*, which evaluates political and economic transformation, and *Management Index* assessing the quality of governance. How are these indices conceived and what indicators do they use? We attempt to briefly outline the system of evaluation criteria that has been with slight modifications used in all annual rankings.

The *Status Index* is generated by the assessment of two dimensions, democracy and market economy, and evaluates the state of democratic development, democratic consolidation and market economy functioning. The quality of ‘Democracy’ is determined based on five criteria using a total of 18 questions in order to determine the state of political transformation. In contrast to other, more narrow or minimalistic definitions of democracy that focus primarily on basic civil rights and free elections, the BTI’s concept of democracy casts a wider net and includes criteria such as the rule of law and the separation of powers. The BTI thus asks to what extent the democratic system is consolidated in terms of its acceptance, its structures of representation and its political culture. In so doing, the BTI shows whether, and to what extent, the basic rules of democracy are anchored in society (Bertelsmann Stiftung 2010a). The five criteria are: *Stateness* (established and constitutionally enshrined institutions, their legitimacy, separation of powers, effective public administration, separation of church

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<sup>9</sup> More information to be found on *The Sustainable Governance Indicators*, available at: <[www.sgi-network.org](http://www.sgi-network.org)>.

<sup>10</sup> All national analyses of individual countries and the evaluation results are available online at: <<http://www.bertelsmann-transformation-index.de/>>. BTI 2003, 2006, 2008 and 2010 results are also presented on the webpage in the form of an atlas. Transformation Atlas is an innovative presentation that allows to visualize the results, emphasizes their comprehensiveness and by the means of maps and global maps provides an overview of international trends in democracy. The atlas is available online at: <<http://www.bertelsmann-transformation-index.de/atlas.0.html?&L=1>>.

and state); *Political Participation* (free and fair elections, freedom of expression, freedom of association and assembly, free press, existence, or non-existence, of veto powers); *Rule of Law* (existence of independent judiciary, effective control mechanisms [checks and balances], ensuring civil liberties and rights); *Stability of Democratic Institutions* (to what extent are democratic institutions accepted and whether they perform as expected); *Political and Social Integration* (existence of a stable political party system accepted by society, networks of interests groups and associations that mediate the relationships between the political system and society, wide-spread acceptance of democratic norms and procedures by the citizens, and development of social capital).

The indicator 'Market Economy' is a result of seven criteria based on a total of fourteen questions used in assessing the state of economic transformation. The BTI concept of market economy flanked by socio-political safeguards encompasses issues such as competition and private property rights, as well as social responsibility, equal opportunity and sustainability. In the BTI concept, comprehensive development should not only lead to economic growth; it should also fight poverty effectively and expand the freedom of choice and action to as many citizens as possible (Bertelsmann Stiftung 2010a). The seven criteria of the state of economic transformation are: *Level of Socioeconomic Development* (social exclusion due to poverty, gender, education, religion or ethnic background); *Organisation of the Market and Competition* (compliance with the rules of market-based competition, sufficient protection against monopolies and cartels, liberalisation of international trade, creation of fundamentals for the banking system and capital markets); *Currency and Price Stability* (independent Central Bank, foreign exchange stability, regulation of fiscal policies, measures against increasing indebtedness); *Private Property* (property protection, privatisation of state property, equality of private entrepreneurs and state enterprises); *Welfare Regime* (social safety nets, health, social and pension security, equality of opportunities); *Economic Performance* (evaluation of macroeconomic indicators, combination of international and national data sources); and *Sustainability* (protection of environment, education, life-long education, support for research and innovation, creating modern infrastructure).

Good governance is the key for effective implementation of reforms. Transition to democracy and market economy can take on many forms; the success, though, depends on the actors and their capabilities to steer this process effectively. Good leaders need to combine governance with consensus-creation in society and cooperation with external organisations. The level of governance success is measured by the *Management Index*, which evaluates the actions of the political leadership regarding democracy and market economy. The Management Index applies four comprehensive criteria aimed at the accomplishment of good governance that measure the level of difficulty of transformation. These criteria are: 1) *Steering Capability* (setting strategic priorities and their implementation, effective implementation of reforms, flexibility); 2) *Resource Efficiency* (effective use of economic and human sources, coordination of conflicting objectives, formulation of coherent policies, fighting corruption); 3) *Consensus-Building* (consensus among elites on the main goals, ability of exclusion of anti-democratic forces and their integration, ability of the government to prevent social polarisation, building solidarity among individual social groups, participation of civil society on decision-making, reconciliation with the past); 4) *International Coordination* (making use of the support by international partners for the implementation of reform policies, readiness for

bilateral, regional and international cooperation). An additional, fifth criterion is the *Level of Difficulty* (assessment of the structural conditions that influence the scope of political action – strong tradition of civil society, intensity of conflicts – ethnical, religious etc – in society, GDP per capita, purchasing power parity, UN Education Index).

Due to its elaborate theoretical and methodological basis, the BTI is considered a much better and useful instrument for democracy measurement than the Freedom House Index (Muno et al. 2009). The current criticism of the BTI focuses on five aspects. For one, the comprehensive character of the index does not take full advantage of concepts that it is based on: this complexity consisting of the integration of more indicators in some of the measured aspects should be explained better and used more effectively. Secondly, one of the cornerstones of the index is the separation of powers based on the indicator of ‘judicial independence’. Yet this indicator should also accommodate other aspects of the rule-of-law (and its German ‘sister’ concept *Rechtsstaat*). Thirdly, similar to the Freedom House Index, the aggregation of data and the weight of individual indicators are quite problematic: it is especially the integration of the democratic and market aspects of the ‘Status index’ that faces great criticism for being insufficiently theoretically substantiated. Fourthly, the index focuses on new democracies with a higher level of democratic achievements. Some authors thus claim that some other aspects such as war or violence, so common in many new democracies, especially in the initial phases, are insufficiently dealt with. Fifth, and finally, the index downplays the importance of informal networks and rules that in many cases co-exist with the rule-of-law structures and often harm them (Müller and Pickel 2007; Muno et al. 2009, cf. Giannone 2010).

It has already been noted that the BTI does not include countries with stable and functioning democratic systems and developed market economy, which excludes most of the OECD countries. For this reason, another index – the Sustainable Governance Indicators (SGI) – was developed that allows for more differentiation as it compares only developed countries. The index follows the dynamics of economic and social changes, their consequences and how the political system reacted. Out of post-communist countries that are also members of the EU, the index lists the Czech Republic<sup>11</sup>, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia. The core hypothesis of the SGI is that in the highly developed industrialised OECD countries, the strategic and reform capacity of policy-making is decisive for the quality of public services and it conditions the quality of democracy and the market economy. The OECD countries are not facing the challenges posed by constant transformation; however, they must make continuous adjustments to their systems in order to keep their democracy and market economy viable and effective. The SGI thus concentrates mainly on the need for reform in key policy sectors and the specific problem-solving capacity of each government.

The next section sheds some light on the democratic development in the Czech Republic in the previous roughly ten years according to the criteria of the Bertelsmann Transformation Index.

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<sup>11</sup> The Czech Republic became a member of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in December 1995.

## Assessing the quality of democracy in the Czech Republic

A complex analysis of the quality of democracy in the Czech Republic by national researchers has so far been quite limited. Czech scholars mostly tend to focus on some selected aspects of democracy such as the suffrage or electoral engineering (Filip 1997; Klíma 2001), the development of the party system (Novák 1997; Fiala, Strmiska 1998; Kunc 2000), elections and electoral campaigns (Šimíček 2000), or the civil society (Rakušanová 2007a). Our aim is not to review the existing literature on the topic but rather attempt to summarise some of these aspects and provide an overall evaluation of the quality of the Czech democracy by the use of the theoretically grounded and methodologically elaborated BTI.

In the course of nearly twenty years of its existence, the Czech Republic has undergone three key transformational phases: *Political* – building a system of democratic governance; *Economic* – transition from the centrally planned economy to market economy; *Constitutional* – after the break-up of Czechoslovakia in 1993, the accession to the EU in 2004 and the joining of the Schengen zone in 2007, the concept of statehood was redefined.

From an international comparative perspective, the Czech Republic belongs to a category of countries with a successful political transformation and a consolidated market economy. The negative trends, symptomatic of the development in the second half of the 1990s, were later overcome and in many respects turned into a positive development. It can be claimed that the transformation process had clear aims and proceeded in a consecutive manner. However, some fluctuations appeared, which are not important for the sake of comparative studies, but they had a strong impact on domestic politics (this will be later demonstrated through the BTI data). After the 2006 general elections, the political situation in the Czech Republic has been marked by a continuous struggle between a weak centre-right coalition government and a strengthened opposition as well as by growing internal divisions within the major political parties. The two major cleavages of both the inter-party struggle and the internal divisions within the parties represent a political context that has framed economic reforms such as pension and health care reforms and the debates on the depth of the European integration process. This political development has been accompanied by an ever-growing disenchantment of the citizens with the political parties and the performance of government.

What is then the state of Czech democracy in terms of the BTI criteria? Given the focus of this paper and the comprehensiveness of the entire concept of the BTI, we shall concentrate on the democratic development through the lens of the particular evaluation criteria. It needs to be noted that the situation in the Czech Republic will be assessed as compared to other countries in the region and in its entirety, i.e. a shift (towards progress or regress) records the change in situation in comparison with other transforming countries in the region.

Table 2 clearly shows that the Czech Republic has been able to keep its high ranking among countries in transitions. In some aspects, though, the development has been slowed down and the rectification of defects has taken longer than at first assumed at the end of the 1990s – especially in the real of political and social integration. The individual criteria can be briefly presented in the following manner:



Table 2: Assessing democracy in the Czech Republic

	BTI 2003	BTI 2006	BTI 2008	BTI 2010
Stateness	10,0	10,0	10,0	10,0
Political participation	10,0	10,0	10,0	10,0
Rule-of-law	10,0	9,0	9,3	9,5
Stability of democratic institutions	10,0	9,5	9,5	10,0
Political and social integration	10,0	8,8	9,0	9,5
The overall state of democratic progress	10,0	9,5	9,5	9,8

Source: Bertelsmann Stiftung 2003, 2006, 2008a, 2010b. Note: The BTI scale ranges from 1 (lowest rating) to 10 (highest rating).

## Stateness

On the basic macro level, which involves the creation, functioning and consolidation of democratic structures (parliament, government, president, constitution, electoral system), the Czech Republic regularly achieves high scores. Together with the new constitutionality in the country the basic pillars of democratic legal norms were adopted. The shaping of democratic and economically free legal conditions has taken much longer and its substantial form has not been and could not have been finished until today. Nor the constitutional order has undergone any fundamental changes apart from some necessary amendments. Gradually, the individual articles of the constitution have been fulfilled by the creation of the Upper Chamber (Senate) in 1996 and the formation of first-level administrative districts. The *Charter of Fundamental Rights and Basic Freedoms* is part of the Czech constitutional system and among other things guarantees Czech citizens the freedom of expression and the right to seek and disseminate information. The right to information is further guaranteed by the Act of 1999 that entered into force in 2000. Although significant progress has been made in this respect, there is still a possibility for improvements – either regarding the law on the right to information, or the administrative procedures for its implementation, or the duty of some subjects to provide information – as noted in the report by the *United Nations Economic Commission for Europe* from 2005.<sup>12</sup>

On the issue of the relationship between the state and church, the BTI strictly requires the separation of these two institutions, despite the fact that some West European countries prefer a different settlement of this issue (e.g. the United Kingdom). From this point of view, one institutional criterion of consolidation has been lacking in the Czech Republic because the relationship between the state and church has remained unresolved in the period of consolidation. The church is not strictly separated from the state and some property claims remain unsolved. The Czech Republic ranks among the most secular state in Europe (Eurobarometer 2005), despite the fact that the church was embedded in the society in the democratic interwar period and has played an overall positive role during the political transformation. Although the representatives of churches have not actively participated in any electoral campaign, nor did they interfere in the political life, church has been an important institution during the period of restoration of social cohesion and revitalisation of the civil society because of the establishment of numerous charities.

<sup>12</sup> See Freedominfo.org, available at: <<http://www.freedominfo.org/regions/europe/czech-republic/>>, accessed 18.8.2010.

## Political participation

The normative concept of political participation is one of the key BTI criteria of political transformation. Political participation is understood as the existence of political freedom that includes free elections. Since 2003, the year of inclusion of the post-communist countries into the index, the Czech Republic as well as the East-Central Europe has ranked very high in this criterion. There are basically no significant hindrances during the preparation and organisation of free elections.

Political participation also involves the right for political organisation for the purposes of influencing the decision-making processes from below. Political parties as well as NGOs and groups of citizens have the possibility to represent their interests and the interests of their members, and have an impact on the decision-making process. The right of association and organisation is guaranteed by a body of legislature and so far there have not been any attempts of infringement. Its foundations were laid in the early 1990s and since then have been further developed and improved by amendments and new legislature. In the case of political representation, it is above all the system of territorial and functional representation of interests (political parties and interest groups): despite the fact that the party system is fairly consolidated, there is no effective system of representation of interest. Very weak are especially the ties between political parties and interest groups during the legislative process.

The party system is relatively stable and its fragmentation and polarisation is quite low. Electoral instability is above the West European average but it does not pose any threat to the political stability in the country. The law on political parties and movements governs the creation and registration of political groupings. Currently, 148 political parties have been registered out of which 130 are active according to the official administrative rules (most of these parties are regional and local groupings active on subnational and local level). Until today, the registration of 20 groupings has been cancelled and 18 organisations suspended.<sup>13</sup> A current and controversial case is the petition of the government from 17 February 2010 on the ban of the Workers' Party currently discussed by the Supreme Administrative Court. The government argues that the party poses a threat to the democratic order of the country not only because of its xenophobic, jingoistic, populist and homophobic opinions but also because of its links with extreme right-wing organisations as well as its program and symbols that take upon Nazi Germany. Moreover, it further argues that the leaders of the party incite racist and other types of hatred and that the party aims to change the democratic order in the country<sup>14</sup>.

The Czech party system has quickly stabilised and since 1992, parties with a consolidated internal structure, currently five parties since the last elections, have had seats in the parliament. The main problem, though, lies in the responsiveness of the political parties to the citizens. Only a very small number of the Czech citizens identifies with any political party, which would demonstrate a party membership. According to the findings of Linek and Pecháček (2007), Czech citizens can be characterised by a very low level of partisan identification, low level of party

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<sup>13</sup> Ministerstvo vnitra České republiky, <<http://www.mvcr.cz/>>, accessed 16 March 2008.

<sup>14</sup> See <<http://aktualne.centrum.cz/domaci/soudy-a-pravo/clanek.phtml?id=660985>>, accessed 16.3.2010.

membership, and last but not least, by a low degree of support for political parties. Parties thus try to mobilise citizens in order to gain some support and attract non-members by assisting various organisations such as clubs of pensioners or women's clubs. During the elections, political parties also allow for a substantial number of non-partisans on their regional ballots. Subsequently, they attempt to gain successful candidates for their party membership.

Regarding political representation, another phenomenon can be observed: a gradual professionalisation of political elites. While at the outset of the transformation the political elite comprised of only three very diverse groups – reformists from the period of the Prague Spring, representatives of the dissent together with student leaders of 1989, and flexible cadres of the previous regime – the mid-1990s onwards, these first post-November elites have left the political arena and have been replaced by representatives of the so-called grey zone, i.e. those that did not participate in the public sphere of the communist regime and if so, only marginally. Also in the parliament we can observe a shift from 'political amateurism' to 'professional politicians' (this does not rule out criticism). A sort of stabilisation of the recruitment process and parliamentary political elite has been achieved, which demonstrates a high rate of re-elected deputies (Mansfeldová 2007; Linek and Mansfeldová 2007).

All previous elections have been fair and have abided by the rules. The current electoral law has undergone some minor changes throughout its existence. Approximately since 1996, when difficulties arose regarding the creation of a coalition or majority government, the change of the electoral law has been discussed. The issue has become even thornier after the stale-mate result of the 2006 parliamentary elections when it took seven months for a government to gain the vote of confidence. The final settlement of the post-electoral *cul-de-sac* has been an important test of Czech democracy and has disclosed the character of the main political actors. It turned out that the system of separation of powers has taken firm roots in the Czech political system. Last but not least, the urgent need for an electoral reform has become apparent.

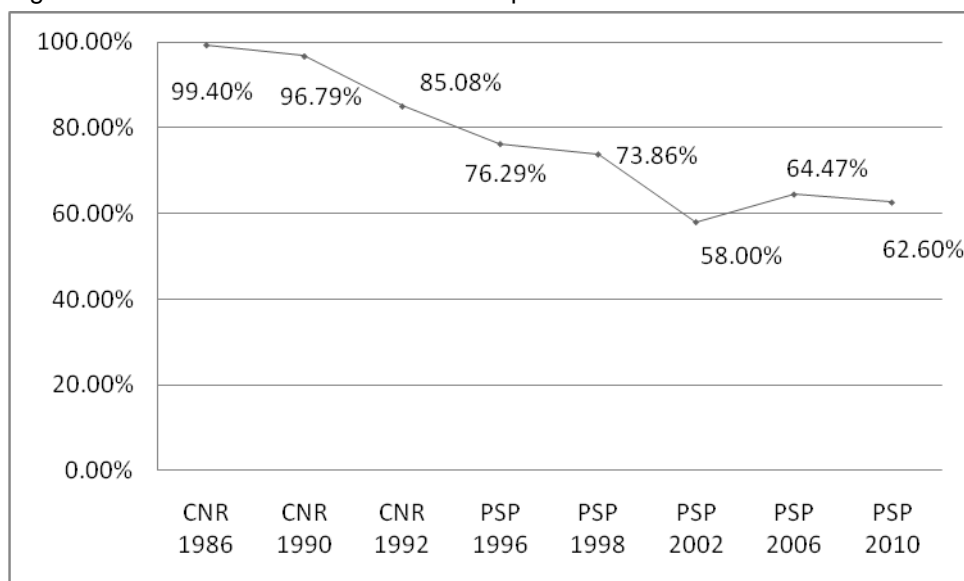
The democratically elected parliament and government of the Czech Republic have the effective power to govern and are not constrained by any non-democratic veto powers. However, in 2008 tensions grew between the Topolánek's government and President Klaus on the one side, and the President and the Constitutional Court on the other. The pending issue was the deepening pro-European orientation of the government and the signing of the Lisbon Treaty. In the fall of 2008, Prime Minister Topolánek defended his position as the Chairman of the Civic Democrats and shifted the party towards a more pro-European stance. This move led to a dramatic renunciation of the position of the honorary Chairman (and the founder) of the Civic Democratic Party by President Václav Klaus. After that, President Klaus announced his intention to found a Czech branch of the Irish Eurosceptic party *Libertas*, which was later founded. Consequently, several other Eurosceptic groups announced the intention to form new political parties; however, during the period under study, no new party of this orientation was registered.

Another case in point was the fragmented political scene and incapability to reach a political consensus after the presidential elections of February 2008. During the elections, 281 Members of the Parliament (200 deputies and 81 senators) re-elected the incumbent Václav Klaus for President to his second term in the third round of the

second vote. The presidential elections very well illustrate the current state of the Czech politics: while the leading party of the coalition government (Civic Democrats and partially also Christian Democrats) supported Václav Klaus, the Greens (also part of the then governing coalition) together with Social Democrats jointly supported the Czech-American economist Jan Švejnar. During the campaign, Jan Švejnar tried to directly address and make contact with the public. Several parties announced the intention to support an electoral reform that would introduce direct popular presidential elections. The 2008 presidential elections denoted a deep division in the governing coalition and further destabilised it.

The overall decrease of public interest for participation in the public sphere can be illustrated not only by the constantly critical opinion of Czech citizens on political parties but also by the significant and gradual drop in electoral turnout from 1992 to 2002 (Figure 2). However, in the past few years, the trend in decreasing turnout has stopped, which became apparent during the parliamentary elections to the House of Deputies in 2006 with a turnout by six per cent higher than in 2002. In the 2010 elections, however the overall participation decreased by almost 2%.

Figure 2: Electoral turnout in the Czech Republic between 1986 and 2010



Source: Data of the Czech Statistical Office<sup>15</sup>

The freedom of press is guaranteed and the media are independent of political parties. A dual system, i.e. a combination of private and public media, has been successfully put in place. There are, though, some recurrent topics for discussion regarding the media – the level of freedom and the ethic boundaries of reporting (limitations on the depiction of violence etc.). Despite numerous signs of disapproval and critiques from one part of the government and leading political actors, there has never been an attempt to limit the independence of the media. The only regression in this respect, which severely undermined the constitutional right to inform and be informed, is the so-called *Muzzle Law*. Amendment to the Act No. 141/1961 Coll. introduced a ban on publishing any account from police wiretapping in the newspaper, internet, TV, or radio. According to the law, for example, it is forbidden to make public the content of police wiretap regarding an important politician, who

<sup>15</sup> Information available at: <[http://www.volby.cz/index\\_en.htm](http://www.volby.cz/index_en.htm)>, accessed 18.8.2010.

lobbied for a businessman under suspicious circumstances and thus establishing the risk of corruption behaviour. The amendment, adopted by the House of Deputies by a clear majority and without further discussion, set severe punishments for journalists such as fines or even imprisonment.

### **Rule-of-law**

The development in the Czech Republic in this area during the past few years can be evaluated quite positively. There are, though, some issues that have so far not been resolved either due to their complex character or lack of political will. After longstanding discussions, Act No. 349/1999 Coll. on the Public Defender of Rights was adopted in 1999. The institutionalised office of the Public Defender of Rights (*ombudsman*) creates a very important corrective and securing element of any democratic society today. The statistical data on complaints and regular quadrennial and annual reports submitted to the House of Deputies by the ombudsman confirm the growing authority of this institution and its gradual anchoring in the system of democratic institutions. After a systematic increase in complaints in the first year of its existence, the number of claims has reached an annual average of 6,000. Not all of these, though, are within the scope of competences of the public defender. For example, in 2007, only about 58 per cent of the total number of complaints fell within the ombudsman's mandate. The structure of complaints in terms of the public defender's mandate has not considerably changed over time. The most-often addressed issues have been social security, public court administration, the length of judicial process, the Building Code, the activities of the police and healthcare. A simplified mode of submission of complaints through an electronic system has also contributed to the increase in claims.

The length of judicial process is the main problem that negatively affects the performance of the rule-of-law and its perception by the public. More than one half of cases on the regional level have a waiting period longer than two years. This also has an impact on the increase in claims submitted to the *European Court of Human Rights* by Czech citizens, with 2976 submissions in 2007 (*European Court of Human Rights 2007*). Czech citizens have over years found their way around the Czech judicial system and if this has not provided them with the sought justice, they applied to the existing supra-national judicial institutions (a good example is the dispute over regulated rents submitted to Strasbourg by house owners).

The Czech judiciary also has to face wide-spread corruption. According to the global corruption indicator of Transparency International (2009), the Czech judiciary falls within the category of the third highest corruption rate in judiciary in the world. Moreover, according to the same source, the situation has been worsening in the past years.

### **Stability of democratic institutions**

The stability of the democratic institutions is one of the strong sides of the democratic developments in the Czech Republic. The Czech Republic has a stable political system and institutions, and effectively separated democratic institutions. Yet in the past years, the country has experienced frequent tensions between the president and the government as well as between the president and the judiciary. In any case, the

functioning of some institutions has recently been affected by the lack of political will towards achieving consensus and a low level of political culture.

A good example is the nearly three-year period (2003–2005) of insufficient number of judges in the system, which had a negative impact on the performance of judiciary as stipulated by the law. Next to the above-mentioned personal grudges of the Constitutional Court and the president, another case in point is the two-year period of pending chairmanship of the Supreme Control Office. The common origin of these problems was the inability of the political leadership to reach a compromise in appointments.

In the course of the last years, the quality of public administration has been improving as well as the level to which the public is informed, especially thanks to the work of civil servants on the local and regional level. However, the mutual communication between the individual public institutions and the lack of transparency in administrative processes remains a weakness of the system. It also needs to be noted that the public administration as a whole has not become any more transparent than in the past. It is still very difficult to legally set apart nominated and professional officials. Especially on the regional level, political changes correspond with changes in managerial positions.

### **Political and social integration**

After twenty years of democratic transformation and despite some significant successes, such as NATO and EU membership, the Czech Republic has still not achieved a viable social cohesion, social empathy and solidarity between social groups and generations. Using the standards of developed democracies as a benchmark, the Czech society has not been able to restore the social function of family, community and society as such. In theory, it should be activities of individuals and their formal or informal groups (bottom-up) that complement the activities of the social state (top-down) during the building of social cohesion. Ethnic minorities (especially the Roma) in the Czech Republic still face the problem of social exclusion together with the unemployed and home-less individuals.

Having said that, we cannot ignore the fact that the Czech society is not a mere aggregate of individuals but accounts for some high level of societal engagement in civil society, including social networks. Civil society in the Czech Republic has been very successful in creating a vital space between the state and individual interest (Mansfeldová and Kroupa 2005). At present, more than 85,000 non-governmental organisations are registered in the country – a number that has increased significantly following the accession to the EU. The status of the NGOs is legally regulated. The greatest weakness of the Czech non-profit sector, though, is the inability to generate resources from supporters, which has led to a constant dependence on public funding and foreign sources.

However, civil society organisations have never been accepted as a partner in the drafting of state policies. Through the prism of the state and its institutions, civil society is a complementary force, or a sub-supplier of social services rather than a partner in public discussions on political issues and the overall direction of the country (Rakušanová 2007b). This finding illustrates the debate on the European Constitution in 2004 – 2006 that was predominantly conducted by the government,

while civil society was marginalised during the ratification process (Rakušanová 2007a). A similar situation recently occurred during the debates on the Lisbon Treaty. A very positive stimulus for the deepening of cooperation between state institutions and civil society organisations was the accession to the EU. Most importantly, the use of European structural funds was conditioned by the inclusion of civil society into projects aimed at the solution of some vital social issues – the so-called partnership principle. Recently, the cooperation between the state and civil society has been widely accepted especially on the local and regional level.

An important aspect of political and social integration of the Czech society is the ongoing consolidation of Czech parliamentarism. The results of the parliamentary elections to the House of Deputies have led to a decrease in fragmentation (0,68) and the effective number of parties (3,1) mainly due to the fact that the two leading parties – Civic Democrats and Social Democrats – gained more than two third of the seats (2006). On the other hand, the divisiveness of election campaigns prior to the elections has also led to the polarisation of society and the party system.

## Summary and international comparison

It can be concluded that the Czech political transition towards a consolidated democracy has been very successful from the outset in the early 1990s, and the country has even improved its position over time (see Table 3). The BTI evaluation tool, used in this study and described above, works with the assumption that a successful transformation must be pursued in the political as well as the economic dimension and any complex analysis of this topic must include both of these aspects. However, in the comparative analysis of the Central and Eastern European region, the political dimension received significantly less attention, therefore our study, while acknowledging the importance of the economic dimension concentrates on the political aspects of the transformation and consolidation of democracy in the Czech Republic. Looking at the Czech Republic through a global lens, we can evaluate its development as unequivocally successful, especially given the fact that the Czech Republic ranked first among 125 transforming countries studied in the 2008 as well as in the 2010 BTI. A more detailed comparison provides Table 3.

Table 3: 2003, 2006, 2008 and 2010 *Status Index* – ranking of new EU member states in East-Central Europe

Country	Ranking				SI Value			
	2003	2006	2008	2010	2003	2006	2008	2010
Hungary	1	5	5	8	9,7	9,16	9,18	9,00
Lithuania	2	7	6	7	9,6	9,02	9,16	9,04
Slovakia	2	6	7	6	9,6	9,06	9,14	9,14
Slovenia	2	1	2	2	9,6	9,45	9,49	9,52
<b>Czech Republic</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>9,6</b>	<b>9,23</b>	<b>9,56</b>	<b>9,65</b>
Estonia	6	2	3	4	9,5	9,29	9,42	9,34
Poland	7	9	11	10	9,4	8,90	8,76	8,86
Latvia	12	14	13	13	8,7	8,20	8,60	8,51
Bulgaria	18	16	15	14	7,7	7,98	8,44	8,36
Romania	21	19	17	16	7,3	7,89	8,31	8,23

Source: Bertelsmann Stiftung 2003, 2006, 2008a, 2010b.

A more detailed look at the composition of the index and the differences in profile between the individual countries is provided in Table 4.

Table 4: Comparison of elements of the 2003, 2006, 2008 and 2010 Status Index of the new EU member states in East-Central Europe

Country	Political Transformation				Economic Transformation			
	2003	2006*	2008	2010	2003	2006*	2008	2010
Hungary	5,0	9,40	9,35	9,25	4,7	8,93	9,00	8,75
Lithuania	5,0	9,25	9,35	9,30	4,6	8,79	8,96	8,78
Slovakia	5,0	9,20	9,20	9,35	4,6	8,93	9,07	8,93
Slovenia	5,0	9,55	9,70	9,75	4,6	9,35	9,29	9,29
<b>Czech Republic</b>	<b>5,0</b>	<b>9,45</b>	<b>9,55</b>	<b>9,80</b>	<b>4,6</b>	<b>9,00</b>	<b>9,57</b>	<b>9,50</b>
Estonia	4,8	9,40	9,55	9,60	4,7	9,18	9,29	9,07
Poland	5,0	9,20	8,80	9,00	4,4	8,61	8,71	8,71
Latvia	4,4	8,30	8,70	8,85	4,3	8,11	8,50	8,18
Bulgaria	4,0	8,45	8,70	8,75	3,7	7,50	8,18	7,96
Romania	4,0	8,20	8,55	8,50	3,7	7,57	8,07	7,96

\* Change in the scoring scale. Source: Bertelsmann Stiftung 2003, 2006, 2008a, 2010b.

An analysis of the findings from the four time periods allows us to divide the studied transforming countries into five groups depending on their level of development: 1) consolidated democracies; 2) countries with good prospects for consolidation; 3) countries with some defects; 4) countries with very unfavourable initial conditions; and 5) countries with serious limitations.

The first group of consolidated democracies consists of eight EU member states from East-Central Europe, including the Czech Republic, which has over time attained first place. Turning our attention to the two East European countries that joined the EU in 2007, Bulgaria and Romania, it is noticeable that they have gradually, though slowly, improved their position in the ranking. We can assume that the EU conditionality was one of the driving forces behind political and social reforms. Status Indices from 2006, 2008 and 2010 clearly show that the group of countries with a high level of political and economic transformation remains nearly identical.

However, the implementation of reforms is also conditioned by high degree of good governance. Transitions to democracy and market economy can proceed in many ways. The success thus depends mainly on reliable actors that are willing to steer this process in the most effective manner. In this respect, as shown by the 'Management Index' and its development, the Czech Republic still needs to catch up in many areas (see Table 5).

In the evaluation of government performance, the Czech Republic significantly lags behind some countries in the region in terms of capability of political actors to implement reforms and reach consensus. Over time, its position has worsened in comparison with other countries, which resulted in the return to the starting position in the period after 2008. In this area, the best progress has made Estonia; even Slovakia has a higher ranking than the Czech Republic in this area.



Table 5: 2003, 2006, 2008 and 2010 *Management Index* – ranking of new EU member states in East-Central Europe

Country	Ranking				MI Value			
	2003	2006	2008	2010	2003	2006	2008	2010
Estonia	1	7	2	3	7,9	7,29	7,43	7,33
Lithuania	2	9	15	10	7,7	7,00	6,70	6,91
Slovakia	6	6	5	8	7,4	7,32	7,20	7,03
Slovenia	10	4	12	18	7,0	7,41	6,83	6,55
<b>Czech Republic</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>6,7</b>	<b>6,95</b>	<b>6,62</b>	<b>6,95</b>
Hungary	12	15	18	20	6,7	6,81	6,67	6,51
Poland	14	23	53	19	6,6	6,36	5,27	6,52
Bulgaria	20	21	13	14	6,4	6,51	6,73	6,67
Latvia	21	16	10	13	6,3	6,78	6,86	6,68
Romania	25	24	22	25	5,7	6,33	6,49	6,27

Source: Bertelsmann Stiftung 2003, 2006, 2008a, 2010b.

A closer analysis of democratic development reveals that democracy in the Czech Republic is consolidated. The country has functioning democratic structures, the existing institutions are further refined and the process of administrative decentrisation has been brought to an end. Nonetheless, there is space for improvements not only in the political realm but also in civil life. The rule-of-law criterion remains one of the main problems, which is similarly the major weakness of all East-Central European states. As Merkel noted, a very good level of political participation and insufficient rule-of-law is symptomatic of this region (Merkel 2007: 425).

In any case, there are also differences among the East-Central European states – Slovenia, Lithuania, Slovakia, Czech Republic, Poland, Hungary and Estonia come near to the West European standards whereas the others are rather sluggish in this respect. When comparing eighteen East-Central European states in his BTI analyses, Merkel identified three factors that account for the greater success of the first group on its way to consolidated democracy: 1) Level of modernisation; 2) Territorial integrity, effective state structures ensuring the functioning of the state and administration; and 3) External factors, i.e. integration in regional and international structures and organisations (Merkel 2007: 426–9). In his more recent work, Merkel divides these states into four groups according to the level of democracy they achieved in terms of the *Status Index*. The countries compared in this study belong to two of these groups: 1) Slovenia, Estonia, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovakia, Poland, and Lithuania; 2) Bulgaria, Latvia, and Romania (Merkel 2008: 19–20). What are then the strengths and weaknesses of democracy in the Czech Republic? A clear overview of our findings is provided in Table 5.

Table 6 is a general summary of the criteria used in the *Bertelsmann Transformation Index* and it relies on the regular evaluations of the quality of democracy in the region in the years 1998 to 2010. Probably the most critical weakness of the Czech democracy is the growing gap between the political parties, or the political representation as such, and the citizens, which is also closely related to the low interest for public affairs. Compared to other established democracies, the levels of political and civic participation is also very low. Similar challenges face also other young democracies; the Czech Republic is thus not an exceptional case. However, it is alarming that these problems are ignored and not dealt with.

Table 6: Strengths and weaknesses of democracy in the Czech Republic

<b>Strengths</b>	<b>Weaknesses</b>
Consolidated system of political parties	Bare majority governments preclude the adoption of key political decisions and reforms with a long-lasting effect
Stabilised parliamentary party representation	Growing distance between political parties and citizens
Effective separation of powers	Low and decreasing electoral turnout
No major ethnic, religious or political conflicts	Strong emphasis on political parties in the process of interest representation
No major opponents of democratic changes	Overall low interest in public affairs
Tendency towards reconciliation with the communist past	Corruption
Important attempts to solve some major issues such as political and social inclusion of minorities into the mainstream of society	Long and protracted judicial processes
Completion of territorial and administrative reforms	Endurance of clear division between the public and private sphere

Source: Rakušanová and Řeháková 2006: 34 (amended).

## Conclusion

To conclude, democracy in the Czech Republic assessed by formal criteria can be considered as fully consolidated. There is, though, space for improvements not only in the political sphere but also in the civic life. This finding is very well supported by the broad international comparative analysis of the Bertelsmann Transformation Index that has revealed some problematic aspects of democratic systems by the use of a theoretically grounded and empirical analysis.

The results of *Status Index* of the BTI in the Czech Republic described above can be summarised as follows: The Czech Republic is an established democracy with constitutionally enshrined institutions and the separation of powers. Public administration has been constantly improving although separation of church and state has not been carried out. Free and fair elections are held on a regular basis and the freedom of expression, press as well as the right for association are guaranteed. There are no significant forces that would preclude the execution of state powers. As for the elections, the frequent occurrence of small parliamentary majorities has a negative impact on governance and on the political culture in the country. The Judiciary is independent but has been unable to strengthen its effectiveness, which demonstrates the increase in applications to the European Court of Human Rights criticising the length of judicial processes in the Czech Republic. Control mechanisms (checks and balances) are in place and civil rights and freedoms are guaranteed.

The Czech Republic has developed a stable political system and institutions as well as a clear separation of the individual institutions. However, the relationship between the latter and the citizens is quite weak, which can potentially endanger the legitimacy of the entire democratic order. Building social cohesion and elimination social exclusion are thus very important current issues. Viability and legitimacy of democracy in the Czech Republic and Europe in general depends on the fostering of ties between the political elite and the citizens.

The Czech Republic has thus an abundance of possibilities to improve the quality of its democracy. The social discourse on this topic could be assisted by a well-researched analysis of the individual strengths and weaknesses of the Czech governance. However, the current situation can improve only by the concurrence of political will and public interest and a bottom-up exertion of pressure.

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