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**To Stay the Course or Cross the Floor:
Members of Parliament, Parties and
Party System Change in Central
Europe**

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Abstract

The stability of the party systems in formerly communist Central Europe have been subject to considerable debate, cast in terms of party organisation, patterns of competition as well as electoral volatility. Although the Czech and Hungarian party systems are more stable than those of Poland and Slovakia in terms of both political parties and patterns of competition, all four party systems have acquired a considerable degree of stability. The present paper turns the focus to the fate of the elected representatives, and explores patterns of continuity and change for members of parliament. Elite continuity is generally somewhat stronger than might be expected given electoral change, particularly in the two less stable countries. Contrary to suggestions that parties are unstable and elites migrate among them, the evidence shows that remarkably few politicians successfully leave one party and go on to win representation for another, let alone abandon parties that are in decline and fall below the electoral threshold. Most apparent transfers between parties are in fact a matter of name changes, electoral alliances, mergers or splits.

Over the decade and a half that has passed since the collapse of communism the four Central European states have acquired relatively stable party systems, albeit with considerable variation in both degrees of stability and patterns of competition. Hungary and the Czech Republic feature stable parties and competition between blocs; Poland has well-established competition between the post-communist left and post-Solidarity 'right', but less stable parties; and despite recent changes, even Slovakia features a stable core of parties (Bakke & Sitter 2005). Even though the party organisations may be somewhat less stable, developments in the four countries are comparable to those in Western Europe (Smith 1993, Mair 1997). Paul Lewis argues that even if "talk of 'remarkable stability' is hardly appropriate [...] signs of such a situation developing are visible in both the Czech Republic and Hungary" (Lewis 2004:12). This is a far cry from analyses that suggest that the parties and party systems in the region are exceptional, and particularly unstable (see Offe et al 1998, Lindström 2001, Innes 2002, Kopstein 2003, Kitschelt 1992, Kitschelt et al 1999).

In the present paper we shift the analysis to the level of the individual MP, and investigate the relationship between parliamentary turnover and party system stability. The first section focuses on the parties' electoral fortunes and that of their representatives, and addresses the question: do variations in elite continuity reflect variations in party system stability, over time and between countries; and is there greater stability in terms of MPs than parties? The second section turns to the question of whether MPs tend to get re-elected for the same party, or migrate between parties like 'political nomads' (Olson 1998; Shabad & Slomczynski 2004) or 'refugees' that leave parties in terminal decline to

seek new political homes? The third section turns to the career paths of the MPs that ‘survive’ to serve several term, and asks whether some MPs outlast their parties.

The data set covers all MPs that have served in all the parliaments in the four countries since the end of communism. The focus is on the single-chamber parliaments in Hungary and independent Slovakia and on the lower chambers in Poland and the Czech Republic, and on the two national councils in Czechoslovakia before the ‘velvet divorce’ at the end of 1992 (these chambers then became the parliaments of the new states). The Czechoslovak federal parliament and Czech Senate are included only as possible sources of previous parliamentary experience for MPs that enter the national councils or lower houses. The data have been gathered from publications of the four parliaments and with the help of their information services.¹

Party system stability and change – parties and MPs

By the time they joined the European Union in 2004 the four Central European states had all achieved a considerable degree of party system stability. To be sure, it has varied across countries and time: the Czech and Hungarian party systems saw patterns of competition stabilise in the second half of the 1990s, and are more stable than their Polish and Slovak counterparts. In Hungary a relatively stable set of parties adjusted their strategies of competition in the mid-1990s; in the Czech case the emergence of strong parties was a more gradual process but with a stable pattern of left – right competition. In Poland two-bloc competition developed through the 1990s, but with considerable instability in parties and electoral alliances on the post-Solidarity right. Slovakia features a stable core of parties, but has recently seen considerable change in patterns of competition and coalition building and the emergence of new parties.

Table 1. Party system (in)stability in Central Europe

	Stable bloc competition	Unstable blocs
Stable set of parties	The Czech Republic Hungary since 1995	Hungary 1989–1994
Parties change	Poland (particularly the right) Czechoslovakia 1989–92	Slovakia

This analysis of party system change and stability draws on an understanding of party systems that emphasises the relationship between parties (Smith 1966; Sartori 1976). Party system stability (and instability) is the product of two factors: first, the political party, defined here along Sartori’s lines as an organisation that seeks to propel its candidates into parliament, and usually government, in order to pursue specific policy

¹ The authors wish to thank the Information Services of the Polish, Czech, Slovak and Hungarian parliaments for their generous assistance and provision of information, and Bernt Aardal for help with SPSS syntax. The printed sources include biographical data on Czech and Slovak MPs (*Slovenská Národná rada 1986, 1990, 1992; Národná rada Slovenskej Republiky 1996, 1999, 2003; Česká národní rada 1986, 1990, 1992; Federální shromáždění 1986, 1991, 1992*); electronic data and biographical information have been supplied by the four parliaments’ information services directly and from their websites: the Czech Republic (www.psp.cz; www.senat.cz); Slovakia (www.nrsr.sk); Hungary (www.mkogy.hu); Poland (www.sejm.gov.pl). Candidate information is also available at the web sites of the Czech and Slovak statistical offices (www.volby.cz; www.statistics.sk/struk/volby.htm) and of the University of Essex (<http://www2.essex.ac.uk/elect/database/candidate.asp>).

goals; and second, of patterns of interaction between parties (Mair 1997). This also includes forms of competition between government and opposition (Smith 1979, 1989). This yields an operationalisation of party system change along two dimensions: change in the actual party organisations in a party system, and changes in the patterns of bloc competition. A stable party system features not only stable parties, but also stable patterns of interaction. This means that a degree of party system stability may be compatible with considerable electoral volatility (Bartolini & Mair 1990), and some changes in party organisation. The French party system, for example, has seen repeated changes in party organisation, but considerable continuity in terms of patterns of competition, government and opposition, and personnel (Hanley 1999).

The central question in the present analysis is whether these patterns of stability and change in Central Europe mask more continuity in terms of personnel, and if so, whether this is because representatives move between parties like ‘nomads’ or escape like ‘refugees’ when parties decline. The starting point is to compare changes in parties’ electoral fortunes with patterns of elite continuity and turnover. A brief examination of patterns of electoral volatility shows that Poland features somewhat higher volatility than the other three, and that volatility varies somewhat from election to election. However, if parties that divide or merge between two elections are counted as one for the purpose of calculating electoral volatility, the numbers come out at less than twice the West European averages based on similar calculations (Bakke & Sitter 2005; in contrast to Rose 1996). In any case, because electoral volatility may be as much the consequence of party system stabilisation as a cause of change, it should not in itself be taken as proof of party system instability. However, given that parties on the rise are likely to feature a considerable number of new MPs, electoral change is taken into account when comparing elite continuity across parties and states.

Table 2. Electoral volatility in Central Europe

	1.–2. election	2.–3. election	3.–4. election	4.–5. election	Average	Region average
Poland	34.3	21.3	51.1	36.5	35.8	
Czech Rep.	19.9	22.6	17.2	15.2	18.7	26.4
Slovakia	23.7	23.4	20.3	30.3	24.4	
Hungary	26.8	31.6	21.8		26.7	

Source: Bakke & Sitter (2005), updated to 2006; see Appendix 1 for election years and seat distribution.

Table 3. MP turnover in post-communist Central Europe

	Communist – 1. election	1.–2. election	2.–3. election	3.–4. election	4.–5. election	Average 1.–5.
Poland	76.1	69.6	60.9	60.4	63.9	63.7
Czech Rep.	97.0	62.5	49.0	45.5	41.0	49.5
Slovakia	97.3	60.7	47.3	50.7	67.3	56.5
Hungary	94.8	63.7	52.8	35.2		50.6

The percentage rates report the share of MPs winning seats that did not hold seats in the previous parliament (it excludes substitutes, but counts Czech or Slovak MPs that were members of the National Councils, Federal Parliament and the Czech Senate in the preceding period). The first column indicates changes from the last communist legislature to the first fully competitive elections in 1990, and in the Polish case from the partially free 1989 election to the fully competitive 1991 election (this is not included in the calculation of averages). The numbers of seats and re-elected representatives, broken down by party, are set out in Appendix 1.

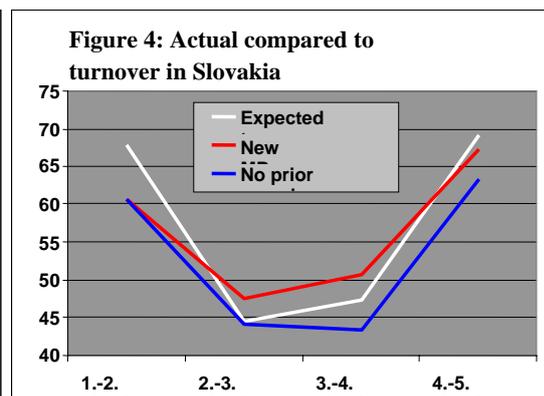
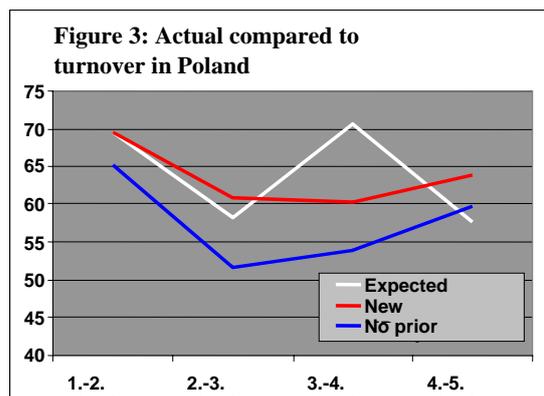
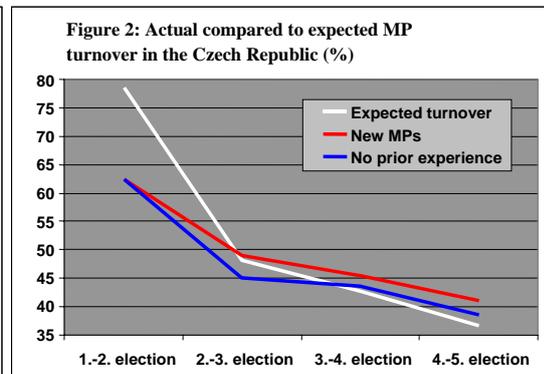
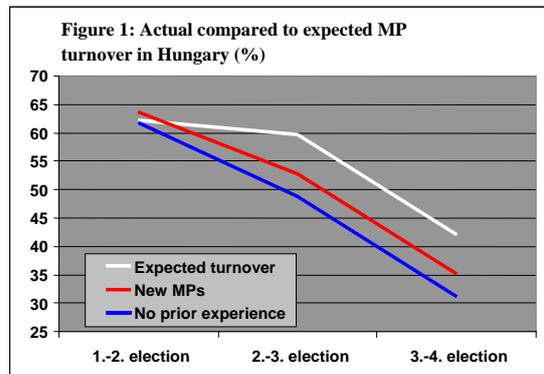
Tables 2 and 3 report electoral volatility and turnover rates for elected representatives. These data broadly confirm expectations about elite continuity based on patterns of party and party system stability and change: higher party and electoral stability in the Czech Republic and Hungary means higher elite continuity. Unsurprisingly, elite turnover was high between the last communist and first fully free elections.² However, persistent patterns of declining elite turnover after the transition to democracy can be found only the Czech Republic and Hungary (Hungarian turnover is lower, despite higher electoral volatility); the Slovak and Polish figures are more ambiguous. Turnover has been persistently higher in Poland, which features a less stable party system and a more volatile electorate. In Slovakia it rose again in the 2002 election, when two established parties failed and three new ones emerged. This represented a dramatic break in the Slovak trend, which had thus far been nearly identical to that of the Czech Republic; and is consistent with the argument that the Slovak party system stabilised around a core of parties centred on support for and opposition to the Mečiar governments of the mid-1990s, but that this was precarious because of the nature of Mečiar's party (HZDS – the Movement for a Democratic Slovakia) and the problems of building a credible alternative (Bakke & Sitter 2005).

These results prompt the question of whether actual elite continuity in parliamentary representation is higher or lower than what might be expected, given the number of seats that change hands in any given election and the 'natural' turnover rate for MPs due to retirement, death, career changes or de-selection. For the purpose of comparison it does not matter what this stipulated 'natural' turnover rate is. Clearly a 100-percent continuity rate is unrealistic, but even such a zero-percent natural turnover rate could be used. In what follows, we have opted for the somewhat more realistic rate of 30 percent natural turnover, i.e. we expect that only 70 percent of the sitting MPs will be re-elected if a party loses no seats. This number also captures variations in parties' fortunes across local constituencies that are not reflected in aggregate party results. Combined with information on aggregate seat gains or losses for any given party, this allows us to calculate 'expected' elite continuity and compare this to actual continuity. The 30 percent turnover is close to what Narud, Pedersen & Valen report for the Nordic countries (2002: 223), and it corresponds well to other West European findings (Best & Cotta 2000: 504-505). To the extent that elite continuity is greater than might be expected, and does not reflect mass migration between viable parties, this will lend support to the argument that post-communist political competition is far from a random game that takes place on a *tabula rasa*, let alone unstructured competition or an 'electoral lottery'.

Figures 1 – 4 report actual and expected elite turnover. Elite continuity may be conceived in terms of direct continuity between two elections, taking into account only direct survivors from one parliament to the next, or extended to include MPs that have any previous parliamentary experience. Figures 1 – 4 report both forms of continuity: the rates of new MPs to enter parliament in each election and the rate of MPs with no prior parliamentary experience at all. In the Czech and Hungarian cases the distinction turns

² However, turnover was much higher than some earlier research has suggested: according to Róna-Tas et al (1999:253) 22.6 and 40.7 percent of the 1993 Czech and Slovak political elite respectively had been members of the Communist Party in 1988, and Hungarian and Polish numbers were reportedly even higher. The Hungarian electoral system was a compromise between the reform communists and the democratic parties, and the former won 10 percent of the votes in 1990. The last 'communist' election in Poland, in 1989, was partially competitive, which explains the higher degree of continuity with the first fully competitive election in 1991.

out not to be so important, but in the Poland and Slovakia a number of MPs have returned to parliament after a spell outside. At the country level, the expected turnover is simply all seats that change hands (on aggregate) plus 30 percent of those that do not. For example, in the Hungarian 1998 election 164 of 386 seats were lost in aggregate, yielding an expected continuity of 70 percent of the remaining 222 seats, or 155 MPs. In fact 182 MPs had served in the 1994 parliament, 27 (or 6.75 percent) more than expected. Another 16 MPs had experience from the 1990 parliament but not the 1994 parliament.



The overall picture is one of elite continuity that is somewhat higher than might be expected from party and electoral change alone, particularly when MPs that return to parliament after one or more periods out of office are taken into account. Hungary and the Czech Republic are the most stable cases in absolute terms, and Hungary is more stable than expected. The extent to which this is because of successful migration between parties or from parties in decline, or whether it is simply the result of well-organised parties with lower turnover than the 'natural' level we have postulated, is explored in the next section. Both the Czech and Slovak cases show particularly high elite continuity between the 1990 and 1992 elections, when the 'umbrella' movements Civic Forum (OF) and Public Against Violence (VPN) broke up into political parties. Thereafter, expected and actual stability are close on both measures in the Czech Republic, which suggests that there is little 'hidden stability' masked by party change. When Czech parties change or electoral fortunes vary, this is largely reflected in MP turnover.

When only representation in successive elections is taken into account (reporting rates of new MPs), the two less stable party systems are broadly similar to the Czech pattern. Only in the Polish 2001 election is there much evidence that party change masks deeper elite continuity. However, the Polish picture changes considerably when all previous

parliamentary experience is taken into account, as, to a lesser extent, does the Slovak one. In this case (reporting only MPs with no previous experience at all), there is more support for the hypothesis that party change might mask elite stability. Polish elections yield relatively high ratios of actual-to-expected turnover, and even Slovak elite continuity is noticeably higher than expected in the 1998 and 2002 elections (in contrast to the Czech rates). While MPs tend to serve consecutive periods in Hungary and the Czech Republic, some 20 percent of the MPs that have served three or four terms in Poland have returned after one or more periods out of parliament (this is mainly a post-Solidarity phenomenon, discussed further in section three, below).

In short, the patterns of continuity and turnover of MPs broadly confirm expectations based on analyses of party system stability in the region. Falling rates of elite turnover are in line with the thesis that the party systems have stabilised, and that Slovakia has yet to develop fully stable patterns of party competition. However, the degree to which electoral volatility is reflected in elite turnover varies across the four cases. Elite stability in the Czech Republic is more or less as expected; in Hungary it is somewhat higher. Less surprisingly, Poland also features higher stability in parliamentary representation than might be expected; as, to a lesser extent does Slovakia. The next section turns to the question of whether these patterns of elite continuity can be explained by MPs' successful migrations between parties, and particularly from parties in decline, and explores the extent to which MPs have been able to leave one party for another, or 'cross the floor', and successfully compete for re-election.

Crossing the floor – patterns of stability and change

Parliamentary representation has been somewhat more stable than what could be expected based on party change and electoral volatility, particularly in the countries with higher electoral volatility and at particularly volatile elections. This could be because some parties are more stable than expected, or because MPs leave parties in decline to compete successfully on another ticket. The present section explores patterns of successful MP migration between parties, both between viable parties ('nomads') and from parties that are about to fall below the threshold for representation ('refugees') to viable parties.

A large number of MPs have successfully fought two elections on nominally different party tickets. It has hardly been exceptional for a handful of MPs, and sometimes two or three dozen, to win election for two parties or alliances with different names in successive elections. However, the vast majority of nominal party changes are precisely that: nominal. This is often a matter of apparent rather than 'real' change, in the sense that it is simply a matter of parties that go through organisational changes, split, merge or run a joint ticket in electoral alliances. Merely reporting the number of MP that run for parties with different names in successive elections would therefore provide a false picture. Parties that change names and parties that join or leave electoral alliances are the most obvious cases of continuity, and must clearly be excluded from an analysis of inter-party transfers. Other organisational changes are more ambiguous, and warrant careful assessment. When parties split and new organisations are formed, we count this as a matter of organisational change and not as a case of MPs migrating between parties. Splits and mergers were taken into account when in the above calculations of electoral volatility and expected turnover, and are likewise taken into account in the present

discussion of inter-party transfers. All the cases counted as a matter of organisational continuity are discussed briefly in what follows.

On the left, all the communist parties split or reformed, and modified their names. The Czechoslovak Communist Party (KSČ) split along republican lines soon after the 1990 election. The Slovak party adopted a social democratic platform, and became the Party of the Democratic Left (SDĽ), while the Czech party remained communist and fought on as the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (KSČM). 16 MPs thus won re-election under different party names in Slovakia's second elections but were in fact KSČ MPs re-elected on the SDĽ ticket. Likewise 20 Czech communists were re-elected in 1992 under the new party name. In Slovakia, the SDĽ fought the 1994 election jointly with Green and Social Democratic candidates, but the two small parties subsequently joined another alliance. In Poland and Hungary the communist parties turned social democrat and changed names prior to the first fully free elections, and became the Alliance of the Democratic Left (SLD) and Hungarian Socialist Party (MSzP) respectively.

In Hungary all other parties either remained stable or split into factions that did not manage to win seats at the next election. There have been a few isolated cases of individual MPs running on joint tickets in single-member constituencies, and one major case of an electoral alliance: 15 deputies from the Hungarian Democratic Forum (MDF) were elected on a joint ticket with Fidesz (the Alliance of Young Democrats) in 2002. However, in these cases the MPs represented separate and distinct parties that were clearly labelled as such.

The Czech 1992 election saw a large number of MPs returned on a different ticket from the 1990 election, but this is deceptive because it is largely a matter of organisational change. The umbrella movement Civic Forum (OF) split into two viable successor parties: the Civic Democratic Party (ODS) and Civic Democratic Alliance (ODA). In 1992, 23 of the ODS' 77 MPs (counting MPs with experience from both the federal parliament and the national council) came from OF, as did 10 of the ODA's 14. The two are clearly successor parties not only in terms of organisation, but also personnel.

The second Czech case is the three MPs from the Christian Democratic Union who joined the ODS in the 1992 election, but actually stayed in the same party. Their party, the Christian Democratic Party (KDS), had run with other Christian democrats in 1990, but switched electoral alliance to the ODS in 1992. When KDS was integrated into the ODS before the 1996 election, two of these KDS MPs joined the Christian Democratic Union – Czechoslovak People's Party (KDU-ČSL): one to run successfully as a senator, the other to win a seat in the lower chamber.

Third, when the Freedom Union (US) split off from ODS after the 1997 scandal and crisis that precipitated early elections in 1998, it was one of the few genuine divisions of a Czech party. Six ODS deputies were re-elected for the US to the lower house in 1998, and another two in subsequent Senate elections. In 2002, the US and the KDU-ČSL ran together in the Coalition.

The 1992 elections in Slovakia saw the same kind of disintegration of a broad movement when the Public Against Violence's (VPN) divided into political parties. The only viable one to emerge was the Movement for a Democratic Slovakia (HZDS), for which 17 former VPN representatives won re-election (14 from the national council and three from

the federal parliament). Between the 1992 and 1994 elections a group of MPs left the HZDS and the Slovak National Party (SNS), and went on to form the Democratic Union (DÚ). These splits forced a change of government and early elections, and in 1994 two of the former SNS deputies and three of those from the HZDS then won seats for the DÚ.

Second, in Slovakia, the coalition of ethnic Hungarian parties has proven remarkably stable in terms of both electoral support and personnel, although there have been minor name changes and a change from alliance to party. 10 representatives from MKDH in 1992 were re-elected in 1994 on the MK ticket, and 12 MPs were subsequently re-elected for the MKP in 1998.

The third case of organisational continuity in Slovakia is the parties that joined together in the Slovak Democratic Coalition (SDK), the SDK itself, and the Slovak Democratic and Christian Union (SDKÚ) that emerged when the coalition could not agree on reorganisation as a political party before the 2002 election. Of the 17 MPs elected for the Christian Democratic Movement (KDH) in 1994, 11 were re-elected for their old party on the joint SDK list in 1998. So were 12 MPs from the Democratic Union (DÚ) and two representatives from small parties that had fought the 1994 election jointly with the Party of the Democratic Left (SDL): a single a single Social Democrat and a Green. 25 of the 42 SDK seats in 1998 were thus filled by returning incumbents, and all MPs elected on the common SDK list were members of the KDH, the DÚ, the Social Democrats (SDSS), the Democratic Party (DS) or Greens (SZ). Eight would return as KDH MPs in 2002, and seven as members of the SDKÚ.

In Poland, the parties that emerged from the Solidarity movement have featured a comparable series of splits and mergers. The first splits had occurred by the time of the first fully competitive election in 1991. On the centre-left, three Labour Solidarity MPs were re-elected for their successor party, the Union of Labour (UP), in 1993. Having won no seats in 1997, the UP joined the Alliance of the Democratic Left (SLD) in an electoral alliance before the 2001 election. Although it could obviously not contribute any incumbent MPs, six representatives that had served with the UP in 1993 won seats for the alliance in 2001.

The liberal post-solidarity centre-right saw a series of mergers before the Freedom Union (UW) eventually fell below the electoral threshold in 2001. In 1993, one MP from the small but deceptively serious Polish Beer Lovers' Party (PPPP) won representation for the Democratic Union (UD) after the parties merged. The Liberal Democratic Congress (KLD) fell below the threshold in 1993, and subsequently merged with the UD to form the Freedom Union (UW): 39 of the UD's 74 MPs from 1993 were re-elected for the UW in 1997. In 2001, a new party emerged on the liberal centre right.

On the Christian national post-solidarity right the Centre Party (POC) was the basis for Walesa's Anti-party Bloc for Reform (BBWR) before the 1993 election, but only two POC representatives won re-election for the BBWR. In 1997, the BBWR formed part of the base for the broader alliance of Christian national parties, Solidarity Electoral Action (AWS), but contributed only two MPs. Another five AWS MPs came from the Confederation for an Independent Poland (KPN). In 2001 the alliance collapsed, but in terms of personnel there would actually be greater continuity between the AWS and three new parties on the right.

The number of Central European MPs that genuinely crossed the floor and successfully sought re-election for another party is thus far lower than nominal changes might suggest. The number of genuine cases of successful floor-crossing, after organisational changes have been filtered out, is reported in Table 4. This includes both representatives that migrate between viable parties ('nomads') and those who successfully transfer from a party that falls below the threshold to a viable party ('refugees'), reported in absolute numbers. Bearing in mind that the Polish (460 seats) and Hungarian (386) parliaments have practically twice the number of seats of the Czech (200) and Slovak (150) ones, the numbers are broadly comparable. With a few significant exceptions, they are also strikingly low.

Table 4. Successful floor-crossing and re-election on a different ticket at the next election, genuine 'nomads' (N) and 'refugees' (R) in absolute numbers.

	1.-2. election		2.-3. election		3.-4. election		4.-5. election	
	N	R	N	R	N	R	N	R
Poland	4	10	4	0	1	49	3	0
Czech Rep.	5	0	3	3	1	0	0	0
Slovakia	1	3	5	0	0	0	0	3
Hungary	5	1	3	8	0	12		

N denotes 'nomads' that leave one viable party to join another; R denotes 'refugees' that leave a party that falls below the threshold. The Slovak and Czech numbers include transfers from the federal parliament and upper chamber.

The Czech lands have seen the lowest incidence of transfers between parties, whether 'nomads' or 'refugees'. Only three deputies have successfully transferred from a party in decline, and they all joined the Czech Social Democratic Party (ČSSD) from two smaller parties before the 1996 election: two from the Liberal and Social Union (LSU), a loose alliance of greens, social democrats and farmers; and one from the Movement for Moravia and Silesia (HDS-SMS). Another nine MPs crossed the floor between viable parties. The HDS-SMS deputy mentioned above had in fact crossed over from the communists between the first and second election. Another communist had gone to the LSU. One had transferred from the HDS-SMS to the Christian Democratic Union – Czechoslovak People's Party (KDU-ČSL); and two from Civic Forum to the ČSSD. In 1996, the ČSSD picked up a communist (KSČM) deputy in addition to the three 'refugees' mentioned above. Only a single deputy successfully crossed the floor before the 1998 election, when Tomáš Teplík crossed from the ČSSD to ODS (he also won re-election for the ODS in 2002). No MPs would repeat this feat in 2002.

The number of genuine floor-crossing MPs in Slovakia is also remarkably low: a mere six 'nomads' and six 'refugees'. In 1992, only one deputy from the Public Against Violence (VPN) achieved re-election without being part of the Movement for a Democratic Slovakia (HZDS): Milan Knažko crossed the floor to the Christian Democratic Movement (KDH) and went on to serve four terms in total (another, Jozef Moravčík, joined the KDH and went to the federal parliament, and returned to the Slovak parliament in 1994). Another three successfully left small parties in decline³ in 1992: one from the Greens (SZ) to the Slovak national Party (SNS) and two from the Democratic Party (DS) to each of the HZDS and the SNS.

³ The Greens and the Democratic Party fell below the electoral threshold in 1992, but in 1994 the Greens ran on a joint list with the SDE, the SDSS and the Agrarian movement in 1994 (and won two seats), and in 1998 both parties were part of the SDK.

In 1994, five Slovak MPs successfully transferred between viable parties: the one who had previously joined SNS from the DS went on to HZDS; one left the Party of the Democratic Left (SDL) to join the Association of Slovak Workers (ZRS); one transferred from each of the SDL and Social Democrats (SDSS) to the HZDS; while another went the other way from HZDS to SDSS (on a joint list with SDL). There were no successful transfers between viable parties in the run-up to the 1998 or 2002 elections, but when the SDL declined and fell below the threshold in 2002 it had a single successful ‘refugee’: Robert Fico, founder of the new Smer (Direction) party. He was adamant that “it is against our principles to accept anyone who has been an active member of another party – except myself” (cited in Učeň 2004: 56). Two others successfully transferred from the single-term Party for Civic Understanding (SOP), one to the HZDS and one to the new Alliance for the New Citizen (ANO).

The pattern of transfers between parties in Hungary is similar, with two significant exceptions. Both cases benefited Fidesz as it grew to become the dominant party on the centre-right. In 1998, as part of a negotiated deal, Fidesz took over seven MPs from the Christian Democratic People’s Party (KDNP) which was in complete disarray over whether to fight on as a separate party or give up and join Fidesz. When the Independent Smallholders’ Party (FKgP) self-destructed over a divide in the run-up to the 2002 election, 11 of its MPs crossed over and went on to win re-election as Fidesz members. Both are cases of MPs leaving severely divided parties that were about to fall out of parliament (the FKgP had also divided before the 1994 election, but then the rump party survived and there were no successful floor-crossings).

Apart from these two cases, there have been few successful transfers in Hungary. Between the two first elections three Fidesz MPs left to join and win re-election for the centre-left liberal party, the Alliance of Free Democrats (SzDSz). One MP from the KDNP transferred to the FKgP, as did one MDF deputy and one independent. Between 1994 and 1998 one MP left each of the MDF and SzDSz for Fidesz. Another MP left the FKgP to win a seat for the far right Party for Justice and Freedom (MIEP). MIEP had broken away from the MDF in 1993, but failed to win representation in 1994, though four of these ex-MDF deputies returned for MIEP in 1998 (the party fell below the threshold in 2002). In 2002, a single FKgP deputy went to the MDF.

In contrast to the other three states, Poland has seen several dozen successful transfers between parties, mainly in the form of ‘refugees’ from parties that disintegrate and decline to new or established parties (59 of the 71 successful transfers). However, most of the cases come from one single election, in 2001. In fact, given that the introduction of an electoral threshold for the 1993 election might be thought to have concentrated the minds of MPs from small parties, it is surprising that only ten MPs successfully left parties that were about to be eliminated from parliament: the Union of Labour (UP) picked up three MPs from different Solidarity groupings and single-representative parties, the liberal UD picked up four, the Confederation for an Independent Poland (KPN) two, and Polish Peasant Party (PSL) one. Two ‘nomads’ went from the Polish Beer Lovers’ Party (PPPP, which had merged with UD) to the Alliance of the Democratic Left (SLD); one crossed from the SLD to the UP and another from PSL to SLD. 1997 saw only four successful transfers, all between viable parties: the SLD picked a single MP from UD, and three UD deputies crossed to Solidarity electoral Action (AWS). Nevertheless, a greater number of MPs had some experience: although the 201-strong AWS inherited a mere 10 MPs

directly from the 1993 parliament, another 34 had served for small parties in 1991; and although none of the six deputies that won representation for the new Movement for Poland's Reconstruction (ROP) had served in 1993, four had experience from 1991.

The big break in the Polish pattern came with the 2001 election, with the reorganisation of the post-Solidarity right. The two main sources of 'refugees' were the AWS and UD, which lost MPs to three new parties: the centre-right Civic Platform (PO), the populist Law and Justice (PiS) and League of Polish Families (LPR). 50 of the UD's 60 MPs lost office, only nine went to PO and another one made the bigger transfer to the SLD. The AWS lost 14 deputies to PO, 12 to PiS and 9 to LPR (its remaining 167 MPs lost office). Four of the ROP's six MPs also won re-election, two for LRP and one for each of PiS and PSL (the first three had also won seats in 1991). The new parties were therefore somewhat less 'new' than it might seem at first glance. Of the 65 PO representatives, 23 came from UW and AWS; 13 of the 44 PiS MPs came from other parties on the right, as did 11 of the LPR's 38 MPs. In total, about a third of the new parties' MPs were inherited from other parties. At least on the right, party change masked considerable continuity in personnel. However, only a single 'nomad' crossed the floor, from the PSL to the SLD. Moreover, this pattern of elite exchange was exceptional: in 2005 Poland was back to a low level of elite transfers. The LPR picked up one MP from the PSL and one from PiS, while one MP crossed from the populist agrarian Samoobrona to PiS.

All in all, a very small proportion of the Central European deputies have successfully crossed the floor: a total of 40 'nomads' have migrated between viable parties and no more than 85 'refugees' have left parties in serious decline and successfully found new homes. Most of these are accounted for by two events: the 49 'refugees' on the post-Solidarity right in Poland in 2001; and the 18 MPs that joined Fidesz from failing parties in 1998 and 2002. Practically all the transfers have been between politically adjacent parties. There is no clear pattern of MPs abandoning parties in decline to compete for bigger parties, at least not successfully, although a number of MPs have found new homes after a spell out of office (particularly in Poland). Of course the data reported here only concern *successful* floor-crossing. However, the Hungarian data set also includes information on MPs that change parties mid-term and fail to get re-elected, and this gives a slightly fuller picture that reinforces our findings: it is very difficult for deputies to transfer between parties, and very few even try. In 1992, 36 deputies broke away from the FKgP to form an alternative smallholders' party; none won re-election. Of the 27 MP who left the FKgP during the 1998-2002 parliament, only the 12 who joined Fidesz or MDF won re-election. The 12 MDF-deputies who formed MEIP in 1993 all lost their seats in the 1994 election (although four returned in 1998). Over the years 17 MPs have left the SzDSz; only three ever won representation again. The moves from the KDNP and the FKgP to Fidesz are the only significant cases of small-party MPs leaving to join a bigger and more viable party. In the next section we turn from the MPs who cross the floor to focus on patterns of party and elite stability and the MPs that have stayed the course and secured multi-term tenure.

Staying the course – MP survival and multi-term tenure

Given that there was nearly complete turnover in representatives between the last communist and first fully free elections, and that only four or five elections have been held since, it is not surprising that most MPs have served only one or two terms (Figure

5). The average tenure for an MP varies between a low 4.8 years in Slovakia and the Hungarian high of 6.5 years, with Poland scoring 5.1 (2005 election not included) and the Czech Republic 5.4. The present section turns to focus to the MPs that have served three or more terms, and explores patterns of stability and inter-party transfers for the ‘survivors’.

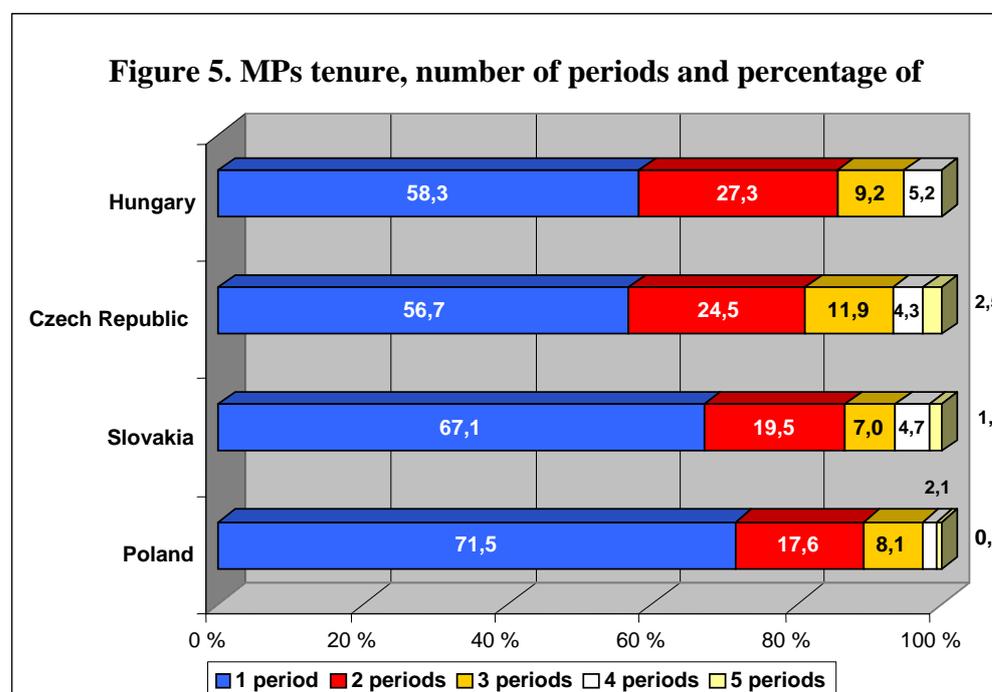


Table 9. The survivors: MPs that served at least three periods (incl. substitutes)

	3 periods		4 periods		5 periods		Survivors total			
	MPs	Same party	MPs	Same party	MPs	Same party	MPs	%	Same party	%
Poland	148	106	42	32	15	12	205	10.7	150	73.2
Slovakia	40	30	27	20	9	7	76	13.4	57	75.0
Czech Republic	70	61	27	19	15	11	109	17.3	91	83.5
Hungary	93	84	52	47			141	14.1	129	91.5

Hungary features the largest group of MPs that have served all periods, in both absolute and relative terms (but it has only had three elections). Almost all of them stayed loyal to their party. The few transfers leading to long-term survival have been between adjacent parties. The two liberal parties exchanged deputies before 1994: one began in Fidesz but switched to SzDSz, another went the other way; three centre-right deputies transferred to Fidesz after the party turned to the right, two from KDNP and one from MDF. Much the same holds for the MPs that served three periods: the nine that had transferred came to Fidesz after one period in SzDSz, MDF or KNDP.

Similarly, in the Czech Republic 44 of the 57 MPs that have served four or five periods stuck with the same party, as did 61 of the 70 who served all three periods. Most of the survivors who transferred between parties moved between politically adjacent parties. They fall in two main groups: one consisting of MPs who ended up in ČSSD after a brief

spell in the Civic Forum, the LSU or in one case, the Communist party; and one comprising MPs who crossed between ODS, KDU-ČSL and US.

The 'loyalty score' for Slovakia is somewhat lower: only 57 of the 76 MPs that have served three or more terms remained within the same party throughout. Two five-term MPs transferred, but only between closely related parties: one from the Public Against Violence to the Christian KDH; and one from KDH to the party that emerged from the coalition, the SDKÚ. Likewise, the other MPs that crossed the floor and survived to serve multiple terms did not travel far: among the MPs who were elected four times there were two switches from the Democratic Party to the HZDS (one via SNS), one from SDL to HZDS, and one from SDL to Smer; there was one cross-over from SDL to ZRS among the MPs who served three periods; while the remaining survivors crossed between HZDS/SNS, DÚ, SDK and SDKÚ; or alternatively between KDH, SDK and SDKÚ.

Poland has the lowest score of long-term party loyalty, coming in just below Slovakia in percentage terms. Long-term loyalty characterises the former regime parties, the SLD and PSL, and the German minority party. The others who served five terms moved among the parties on the liberal centre-right: two from the UD via the AWS to the PO (one of them had also been elected for Solidarity in 1989), and one from the UD (through UW) to the PO. 32 of the 42 who served four terms stuck to the same party. The other ten include a Beer Lover who went to the SLD and two who joined the party from the PSL and UD; one defector who left the PSL to the new populist LPR; and six MPs who transferred among the post-Solidarity parties to end up in the PO or PiS.

In short, eight out of ten Central European MPs who served three terms or more stuck with the same party, and those who crossed the floor did not go very far. Political 'nomads' are hard to come by, and 'nomads' or 'refugees' with long term success even more so.

Conclusion – party stability and elite continuity

Comparative analysis of continuity and change in elected representatives in Central Europe since the collapse of communism confirms that the Hungarian, Czech, Slovak and Polish party systems have acquired a considerable degree of stability. In most cases elite turnover is close to what might be expected given electoral change; in the two countries with more electoral volatility elite stability is higher than expected; and the high-volatility 2001 election in Poland actually featured considerable elite stability. In cases of nominal changes to party labels because of name changes or organisational change, elite continuity is as high as expected. Moreover, upon closer inspection it turns out that elite stability is not a matter of a high number of politicians moving between parties like 'political nomads', or even of them escaping from parties in decline. The Hungarian data indicate that transfers between parties are rare, and the comparative data demonstrated that *successful* transfers are *very* rare. Almost half of the successful direct transfers are the result of two events: the restructuring on the post-Solidarity right before the Polish 2001 election; and the transfers from two smaller parties to Fidesz as it established itself as the main party on the right in Hungary. However, a number of MPs, particularly in Poland, have made a comeback for a different party after spending one term out of parliament when their party fell below the threshold. Many, but not all, new parties thus include some deputies with previous experience. Practically all transfers are between politically

adjacent parties, and very few MPs have made more than one successful transfer. The vast majority of MPs that have served three or more terms have stuck with the same party, and the minority that has transferred has generally not travelled very far. In short, very few MPs in Central Europe successfully transfer from one party to another, and MPs that serve multiple terms do so for one party only. In short, analysis based on data about individual MPs reveals that the notion of unstable party competition and frequent migration between parties is a myth, and confirms the general picture of party stability in Central Europe.

Appendix 1 – Election results

Hungary, seats and returning incumbents (own or inherited from other parties)

	1990		1994		1998		2002	
MSzP	33	5	209	32	134	111	178	89
SzDSz	92	2	69	53	24	20	20	16
Fidesz*	21	0	20	14	148	27	164	129
KDNP	21	0	22	9	0	–	–	–
MDF*	165	10	38	25	17	7	24	16
FKgP	43	0	26	7	48	16	0	–
MIEP	–	–	–	–	14	1	0	–
Others	11	3	2	0	1	0	0	–

*The MDF ran on a joint ticket with Fidesz in 2002.

Czech Republic, seats and returning incumbents (own or inherited from other parties, including directly from the federal parliament or senate)

	1990		1992		1996		1998		2002	
KSČM	32	10	35	20	22	13	24	19	41	18
OF	127	1								
ODA			14	10	13	4				
ODS			76	26	68	49	63	21	58	44
US							19	6	9	4
KDU/ČSL	19	2	15	10	18	14	20	13	22	15
ČSSD			16	2	61	16	74	50	70	37
LSU			16	1						
SPR-RSC			14	0	18	6				
HSD-SMS	22	0	14	6						

Slovakia, seats and returning incumbents (own or inherited from other parties, including directly from the federal parliament)

	1990	1992	1994	1998	2002
SDL	22 6	29 16	15 9	23 9	
VPN	48 0				
HZDS		74 18	61 33	43 23	36 16
SNS	22 0	15 9	9 5	14 7	
MKP	14 0	14 6	17 10	15 12	20 12
KDH*	31 0	18 10	17 11	16 11	15 8
DÚ*			15 8	12 10	
DS*	7 1			6 0	
SZ*	6 0		1 0	4 1	
SDSS*			2 1	4 1	
SDKÚ					28 11
ZRS			13 1		
SOP				13 0	
Smer					25 1
ANO					15 1
KSS					11 0

Six Slovak deputies from the old communist parliament were elected to the federal parliament in 1990.

* Elected as part of the SKD alliance in 1998; the SZ and SDSS won seats on the SDL ticket in 1994.

Poland, seats and returning incumbents (own or inherited from other parties)

	1991	1993	1997	2001	2005
SLD*	60 20	171 49	164 107	216 111	55 42
UP*	4 0	41 7	0 –		
PSL	48 25	132 28	27 22	42 22	25 15
PPPP	16 0				
KLD	37 6	0 –			
UW/UD	62 25	74 42	60 39	0 –	
PO				65 23	133 40
KPN	46 1	22 10			
POC	44 12				
BBWR		16 2			
AWS			201 10	0 –	
ROP			6 0	0 –	
PiS				44 13	155 28
LPR				38 11	34 13
Samoobrona				53 0	56 16
MN	7 0	4 2	2 2	2 2	2 1
WAK	49 3	0 –			
Solidarity	27 4				
PL	28 7				
Others	32 7				

*The UP ran in alliance with SLD in 2001, as SLD-UP.

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