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Where do parties go when they die? The fate of failed parties in the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary 1992–2013

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Abstract

In the two decades that have passed since the collapse of communism, 39 parties crossed the electoral threshold in the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary. Of these, 23 subsequently failed. Only two parties managed to return on their own (one failed again). One is represented as part of an electoral alliance. Some have merged with other parties, some have ceased to exist, and some maintain a twilight existence. We map and analyse the fate of parties that have fallen below the electoral threshold, and explore why some parties cease operations relatively quickly while others soldier on or maintain a ‘zombie-like’ existence. The core factors are the opportunity structures provided by other parties in terms of offers of alliances, mergers and/or new homes for the party elites; the existence of alternative arenas for competition than the national legislature (or national party lists); and the organisational strength of the party that falls below the threshold.

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Failed parties have received scant attention in the party literature. This is hardly surprising, considering that in West European countries, ‘party failure in any absolute or quasi-absolute sense is a rare phenomenon and almost certainly attributable to exceptional circumstances’ (Pridham 1988, p. 230). Party failure has been more common in post-communist Europe, but until recently, most of the parties that failed were relatively short-lived, and their failure could be seen as part of the process of party system consolidation. Much of the literature has therefore focused on the success stories and on party system development in general (Smith 1993, Mair 1997, Kitschelt et al 1999, Lindström 2001, Innes 2002, Kopstein 2003, Lewis 2004, Enyedi 2005, 2006, Hloušek and Chytilek 2007, Enyedi and Linek 2008). Our own previous publications are no exception (Sitter 2002, Bakke and Sitter 2005, Bakke and Sitter 2008, Bakke 2011, Sitter 2011).

The 2010 earthquake elections in the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Hungary represented a novel trend, in as much as five of the six parties that failed to win re-election were long-established parties that had been present in their respective parliaments since the early 1990s. All in all, 23 of the 39 parties (i.e. some 60 per cent) that crossed the electoral threshold in these three countries between 1990 and 2013 subsequently failed. The failure of several long-established parties prompted us to examine what factors put parties at risk, which is why we focus on these three particular countries.¹ In an earlier article in this journal (Bakke and Sitter 2013) we explained why parties in the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Hungary failed to win re-election.² We concluded that small size and formal splits were the most important risk factors, and that (contrary to our expectations) participation in government as a junior partner primarily had an indirect effect: it tended to cause splits that led to failure, rather than lead directly to failure through loss of popularity. In addition several parties suffered from the declining salience of the political issues around which they were built (notably regional and nationalist parties), and a crowding-out effect from bigger and better managed competitors. We thus argued (in line with amongst others Harmel and Janda 1994, Sitter 2002, Haughton and Rybář 2004, Hanley, Szczerbiak, Haughton and Fowler 2008, Mack 2010) that success and failure are largely dependent on leadership strategy.

In the present article we ask what happened to the party organisation and the elites after the parties fell below the threshold, or more specifically why some parties become defunct within one election period of falling out, while others survive longer outside parliament. We suggest that death or survival depends on the strategic choices of the party elites, and on how these are shaped by institutional factors, the opportunity structure provided

by other parties in terms of offers of alliances, mergers and/or new homes for the party elites, and organisational strength.

In the first section below we briefly present the theoretical context. In section two we give an empirical overview of the parties that fell below the electoral threshold between 1990 and 2013. In section three, we summarize what happened to the party organisations when parties failed; and in section four we have a look at what happened to the MPs of the failed parties. Finally, we discuss why some parties are defunct, while others survived.

1. Political parties, party failure and elite strategies

The political party is here defined along Sartori's lines as an organisation that seeks to propel its candidates into parliament, and usually government, in order to pursue specific policy goals (Sartori 1976). In the classical party literature, a party's two key aims were the pursuit of votes and office (Downs 1957, Riker 1962). A third aim, the pursuit of policy, influences both the pursuit of votes and office (de Swaan 1973, Budge & Laver 1986, Dunleavy 1991). However, a fourth goal, which lies at the core of the party's identity, is so obvious that it is often left implicit – the survival of the party as an organisation (Panebianco 1988).

Maximising one goal often means playing down another, and herein lie the dilemmas of party strategy (Strøm 1990, Müller & Strøm 1999) – and indeed the risk of overall failure. We suggest that the party leadership's (or elite's) focus on the pursuit of specific public policy goals, organisational continuity, or their own personal career might help explain differences in the fate of party organisations once they have failed to cross the electoral threshold. This reasoning is very much in line with the comparative West European politics literature on how parties cope with change, notably those reported in projects led by Peter Mair and his collaborators (Katz & Mair 1995; Mair 1997; Mair, Müller and Plasser 2004) – whether it is the Dutch parties' response to dealignment in the 1960s, the Scandinavian parties' divisions over European integration and new politics in the 1970s, or the Italian parties' efforts to cope with electoral system change in the 1990s and 2000s. This article therefore explores how the parties' resources and their options – both the elites' options and the organisations' – affect the fate of parties after electoral failure.

There is no general agreement in the literature on what it means for a party to fail. One possible answer – the one we used in our above-cited analysis of party failure – is that parties fail when they lose representation in parliament, and thereby cease to fulfil their democratic

functions – such as elite recruitment, policy representation, and accountability (Lawson & Merkl 1988, p. 4, Bakke and Sitter 2013). An alternative answer is that parties fail when their party organisation ceases to exist altogether and no successor party takes their place (Rose & Mackie 1988). We label the former ‘failed’ and the latter ‘defunct’ parties. We view both as stages of party decline. The literature that examines variations in post-communist parties’ successes (and failures) to some extent reflects the comparative politics debate about the effects of de- and re-alignment in Western Europe in the 1960s and 1970s (Smith 1993, Mair 1997): success or failure is partly a question of social change, but even more a matter of how existing parties respond to it, and the strategies and partnerships they develop. The central point here is that these kinds of strategic choices, and the interaction between a party and its main competitors, remain pertinent even after electoral failure.

Our focus here is on how and why failed parties subsequently become defunct. Once the party has failed, the elites have four logically possible choices: (1) carry on, and hopefully return to parliament in a subsequent election; (2) form an electoral alliance with other parties or run on the label of other parties; (3) merge with other, ideologically similar parties; or (4) abandonment and close down the party. If the survival of the party as an organisation is a core value, elites might be expected to strive to return to parliament without jeopardizing the party (option 1 and 2), as the small Norwegian Liberal party *Venstre* has done since the 1970s. If the pursuit of policy is more important than the party as such, elites might well try to return to parliament without jeopardizing the ideology, albeit putting the organisations’ independence at risk (option 3), as the three denominational parties in the Netherlands did in 1977 and countless Italian parties have done since 1992. Finally, if the party elites realise that the party is a lost cause, or are utility-maximizing actors whose main concern is their political career, the MPs of failing parties might be expected to flee to other, more viable parties, or start a new party, and membership might decline as career-minded politicians leave for greener pastures (Shabad & Slomczynski 2004). This is much rarer, both in Western and in Central Europe.

First, the post-war European experience indicates that party elites’ room for manoeuvre (and therefore failed parties’ prospects of survival) are shaped by institutional factors such as electoral laws and regulations governing the operation and financing of parties (Lijphart 1994). On the upside, alternative venues for competition at the sub-state, supra-state, or national level may keep a failed party ‘in the game’, at least for a while. Here the room for manoeuvre is slightly bigger in the Czech and Hungarian case than in Slovakia because the

Czech Senate and about half of the MPs in Hungary are elected by majority vote in single member districts,³ making it possible to win seats without polling five per cent at national level. Alternative venues at the sub-state level exist in all three countries. On the downside, parties that fall below the threshold for representation lose not only their MPs, but also a large part of their income: in modern democracies parties are increasingly dependent on state subventions, and subvention schemes tend to favour large parliamentary parties. According to the IDEA Political Finance Database, a large majority of the countries that provide direct state subventions distribute the money proportionally according to the parties' share of votes and/or seats.⁴ Moreover, this is usually combined with eligibility thresholds – in our three countries varying from one percent in Hungary to three percent in Slovakia – which means that the smallest parties get nothing. The loss of income obviously makes it more difficult for failed parties to finance their activities and to run for election, but in addition, some countries actively discourage small parties from running by requiring them to pay electoral deposits that are returnable only to parties that pass a threshold. Small parties are thus doubly punished: first by losing their deposit and second by getting limited, if any state subventions.

Second, based on earlier research on Western European politics, we would expect flash parties to be more likely to become defunct than parties that have been around for a while. Based on data from 19 Western democracies, Rose and Mackie (1988, p. 203) concluded that institutionalized parties (parties that had fought four national elections or more) were less likely to become defunct – 23 per cent disappeared, compared to 61 per cent of the ephemeral parties. Over time parties build up routine, organisation and loyal membership, and sometimes even substantial economic assets. Organisationally robust parties may be less vulnerable to elite defections; have better capacity to field candidates at sub-state level (thus remaining visible to the public); and have sources of income (membership fees, rent) that to some extent can compensate for the loss of state subventions and private donations once they have fallen below the threshold.

Finally, we would expect failed parties that have something to offer, whether in terms of electoral support, members, property, or experienced and popular elites, to be more attractive to potential partners, thus making mergers or alliances more likely – especially if the parties are ideologically similar in the first place. In the two West European party systems with most organisational change since 1945 – France and Italy – survival has often been a matter of finding a home in a new alliance or movement in a given ideological space. The same logic should also apply to individual MPs: they can get re-elected on a different ticket

only if accepted by the gate-keepers of their new party. In both cases, ideology and policy preferences come into play, as does reputation. The first is relatively easy to determine (by comparing parties, or party factions, ideological and policy profiles); the latter is more difficult to establish reliably (though newspapers and interviews offer some insight into individual cases, and indicates that several failed parties and politicians have been shunned by potential collaborators on the grounds of poor reputation linked to policy failure, corruption or politics-as-usual).

The principal choice that faces a party that has failed to cross the electoral threshold is whether to go it alone, or try to merge or ally with an ideologically compatible party. This dilemma is very much a question of party strategy – what a party’s goals should be and how it is to go about achieving them. The principal problem with the merger-or-alliance strategy is that it depends on the party finding partners; the principal danger of the go-it-alone option is that the party’s decline continues and it runs down its resources. The next section maps the empirical experience of Czech, Slovak, and Hungarian parties.

2. Failed parties in the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary – an overview

In this section, we examine the 23 failed parties:⁵ when were they founded, when did they first reach five per cent, and when did they fall below the threshold? The parties are listed in table 1. They are divided in three categories: (1) long-term parties that had been represented in the parliament four consecutive periods or more before failing (this is a strict interpretation of Rose & Mackie’s institutionalized parties), (2) parties that crossed the electoral threshold two or three times in a row before falling out, or returned for a second term after a spell out of parliament, and (3) parties that entered the parliament in one election and fell out in the next. The two latter categories are roughly equivalent to Rose & Mackie’s ephemeral parties.

Failed long-term parties

Seven long-term parties have failed – of these five in the 2010 earthquake elections. Three of the seven had started out as big parties in the 1990s but went into decline in the mid-1990s/early 2000s; three had fairly stable, medium-sized support; and one had varying support prior to failure. The only Czech party in this category is the Christian Democratic Union – Czechoslovak People’s Party (KDU-ČSL), a 1991 merger of the Christian

Democratic movement and the ČSL – a satellite party originally founded in 1919 through the merger of even older Catholic parties from the Habsburg period. The KDU-ČSL enjoyed fairly stable support until its right wing left to found TOP 09 in the summer of 2009; polled below the threshold in April 2010 and failed in the May election, but bounced back in 2013.

The two failed Hungarian long-term parties started out as the biggest parties in the first election. The Hungarian Democratic Forum (MDF) had been the first opposition party to organize, in the autumn of 1987, and was originally based on cultural and national conservatism. When Fidesz (the Alliance of Young Democrats) turned from the liberal to the national right in the mid-1990s, the MDF divided over how to deal with Fidesz, and split over the matter. In the 1998 election it gained mandates only in single member districts as it failed to cross the electoral threshold for PR mandates; in 2002 it ran on a joint list with Fidesz. When it returned to compete as an independent party (on a more market-liberal platform) in 2006, the MDF barely crossed the threshold. After January 2009, its support in the polls fell well below five per cent. The Alliance of Free Democrats (SzDSz) was a liberal party founded in 1988 by dissident groups. Its support dropped sharply in the 1998 election after its first spell in government with the ex-communist Hungarian Socialist Party (MSzP), and from July 2007 opinion polls consistently put the SzDSz below the threshold. By early 2010 the SzDSz was in complete meltdown, an unattractive partner to other centrist parties because of its association with the Socialists, and it failed even to collect enough signatures to field a national list in the April election. It therefore ran only in ten individual constituencies. However, former SzDSz leader Gabor Fodor managed to establish a new liberal party in time for the 2014 election and secure a safe place on the democratic opposition's joint list – a broad alliance of five parties critical of the government's 'authoritarian turn'.

The four failed parties in Slovakia formed the core of the party system in the 1990s. The Movement for a Democratic Slovakia (HZDS) split off from Public against Violence in 1991, and remained ideologically diffuse, albeit left-leaning in economic policy (Hloušek & Kopeček 2004: 157). It was the largest party in Slovakia until 2006 and the kingpin of most governments until 1998, but its support dwindled with the rise of *Smer-SD* (Social Democrats) and it fell out of parliament in 2010. The other party that, somewhat surprisingly, fell below the threshold in 2010 was the Hungarian Coalition party (SMK). This was a 1998 merger of three centre-right Hungarian parties with a pedigree back to 1990, founded in response to the new, higher electoral threshold for electoral alliances (five per cent per party). The party – and before that, the electoral alliance – used to have the most stable electoral

Table 1. Failed parties according to longevity

	Party	Founded	Above threshold in polls	In parliament	Below threshold in polls
Long-term (4 periods+)	Christian Democrats (KDU-ČSL)	1919/91	March 1990 March 2012	1990–2010 2013–	April 2010
	Alliance of Free Democrats (SzDSz)	1988	Jan 1990	1990–2010	July 2007
	Hungarian Democratic Forum (MDF)	1987	Jan 1990	1990–2010	March '96
	Hungarian Coalition Party (SMK)	1990/98	at election	1990–2010	at election
	Movement for a democratic Slovakia (HZDS)	1991	April 1991	1992–2010	at election
	Slovak National Party (SNS)	1990	May 1990 Dec 2003	1990–2002, 2006–2012	March '02 Jan 2012
	Democratic Left Party (SDL)	1921/90	March 1990	1990–2002	Dec 2001
Intermediate (2–3 periods)	Independent Smallholders' Party (FKgP)	1908/89	Jan 1990	1990–2002	Nov 2000
	Christian Democratic People's Party (KDNP)	1944/89	Feb 1990 –	1990–1998, 2006–	May 1997
	[Czech] Greens (SZ) ¹⁾	1990	Dec 1991(LSU) Feb 2006	1992–1996, 2006–2010	Dec 1993 Aug 2009
	Freedom Union (US-DEU)	1998	Feb 1998	1998–2006	Sep 2002
	Civic Democratic Alliance (ODA)	1990	March 1992	1992–1998	Feb 1998
	Republicans (SPR-RSC)	1990	April 1991	1992–1998	³⁾
	Moravian Autonomy Movement (HSD-SMS)	1990	May 1990	1990–1996	Nov 1992
Flash parties	[Slovak] Greens (SZS) ¹⁾	1989/91	March 1990 June 1996	1990–1992, 1998–2002	May 1991 Jan 2000 ²⁾
	Democratic Party (DS)	1990	March 1990 June 1996	1990–1992, 1998–2002	Jan 1992 Jan 2000 ²⁾
	Democratic Union (DÚ)	1994	May 1994	1994–2000	Jan 2000 ²⁾
	Public Affairs (VV)	2002	Feb 2010	2010–2013	May 2011
	Hungarian Justice and Life Party (MIÉP)	1993	at election	1998–2002	³⁾
	Communist Party of Slovakia (KSS)	1991	at election	2002–2006	at election
	Alliance for the New Citizen (ANO)	2001	June 2001	2002–2006	Sep 2005
Flash parties	Party of Civic Understanding (SOP)	1998	March 1998	1998–2002	Jan 2000
	Labour Union of Slovakia (ZRS)	1994	March 1994	1994–1998	Sep 1996

Sources: Party registers; opinion polls from CVVM, ÚVVM, Factum Invenio, Focus, Medián.

¹⁾ The Czech and Slovak Greens united in 1990, but operated quite independently. The SZS was registered in the Slovak party register in October 1991, but after a split in 1992, the pro-federal faction took back the SZ acronym and re-united with the Czech party. The SZS changed names to SZ in 2006, but we have chosen to use the SZS abbreviation in order to keep the Czech and Slovak Greens apart.

²⁾ SZS, DÚ and DS were part of the SDK from July 1997 to January 2000. In this period separate opinion data for these parties were not available.

³⁾ MIÉP polled over five per cent only between June 2001 and January 2002. SPR-RSC was more below than above the threshold in the period 1992–1996. Polls probably underestimated the support of both parties.

support in Slovakia, but failed after the circle around former chairman Béla Bugár left to found *Most–Híd* (bridge) in 2009. The Slovak National Party (SNS), is a classical nationalist party founded in March 1990 whose main agenda has been to fight (Hungarian) minority rights. It was the only party to advocate independence for Slovakia in the run-up to the 1992 election. After a split in 2001, it dropped below five per cent in opinion polls in March 2002 and failed in the September elections. The two factions reunited in 2003, upon which the SNS won re-election twice, in 2006 and 2010, before failing again in 2012. The other long-term party that failed in 2002 was the ex-communist Democratic Left Party (SDL'). Despite winning the bid for the social democratic left after changing its name and adopting a social democratic platform in 1990, it never garnered over 15 per cent in any election. A combination of government fatigue and internal struggles sent the party below the threshold in opinion polls in September 2000, and it was never to recover.

Failed intermediate parties

Ten intermediate parties have failed, and most of these were small. Only one of them ever exceeded ten per cent of the vote: the Independent Smallholders' Party (FKgP) in Hungary. Five of the parties in this category crossed the threshold only once on their own; the second time as part of an electoral alliance cobbled together of like-minded small parties.

The two Hungarian parties in this category were revived historical parties. Both belonged to the victorious Christian national camp in 1990, but were gradually swallowed by Fidesz in the second half of the 1990s when Fidesz changed from a liberal youth party in the political centre to a fully-blown national populist party on the right. Originally founded in 1908, the FKgP became the largest party in the last election (in 1947) before the communist takeover. It went through several splits in the 1990s, partly related to how to cooperate with other parties, took a dive on the opinion polls in November 2000, and was effectively dead as a political force after its final split in the wake of a corruption scandal in 2001. The Christian Democratic People's Party (KDNP) was originally founded in 1944 and held out for two periods in the 1990s on its own. The party formally split in 1997 and fell permanently below the threshold in the polls in May 1997. One of its two factions arranged to run on the Fidesz ticket in 1998 (and thus won seven seats). After the rump-KDNP failed to win seats in either 1998 or 2002, the party reunited. It has since operated as a faction within Fidesz, although it continues to work as an independent organisation with its own party statutes.

All three Slovak parties in this category were re-elected as part of the Slovak Democratic Coalition in 1998 – which occupied the ideological centre-right. The biggest was originally the Democratic Union (DÚ), a liberal party founded in 1994 by elites who had left the HZDS and the SNS the year before. However, by early 2000 the party's electoral support was all but gone, and most of its elites had left to found the Slovak Christian and Democratic Union (SDKÚ). The Slovak Greens (SZS) and the Democratic Party (DS) had won seats on their own only because of the lower three-percent threshold in the first election to the Slovak National Council, and rarely scored above five per cent in opinion polls. The Greens had their roots in environmentalist dissident circles, while the DS was a resurrection of a centre-right party founded in 1944 that had won the 1946 election in Slovakia (Šutaj 1999: 148, Pešek 2005: 1320–29).

Three of the five failed intermediate parties in the Czech Republic belonged to the mainstream centre-right. The Civic Democratic Alliance (ODA) was registered separately already in March 1990, but ran as a part of Civic Forum in the first election, before crossing the electoral threshold twice on its own. It took a dive in the opinion polls when the Freedom Union was registered in January 1998, and decided not to run for re-election. The Freedom Union (later US-DEU) was originally a split-off from the Civic Democratic Party (ODS), caused by the same party finance scandal that brought down the second Klaus government at the end of 1997. It took over the mantle of ODA in the 1998 election, but was already polling perilously close to the threshold when it was re-elected as part of the Coalition (with the KDU-ČSL) in June 2002, and by September that year it was a spent force. In the run-up to the 2006 election the Greens (SZ) rose abruptly in the opinion polls, after broadening their program to include liberal elements.⁶ The SZ had been registered already in March 1990, but made it to the parliament only as part of the Liberal Social Union in 1992, before returning on its own in 2006. Since August 2009 the party has permanently polled below the threshold.

The two remaining failed parties fell below the threshold in the 1996 and 1998 elections, respectively. Both would suffer from ideological isolation. The regionalist Moravian Autonomy Movement (HSD-SMS) was founded in April 1990 and became the third largest party in the first free elections. By the 1992 election it had already gone through one split (Springerová 2010). By November 1992 its support was running way below the threshold, and turning the movement into a party in 1994 did not help. The nationalist Republicans (SPR-RSC) were first registered in February 1990, won representation in 1992 and again in 1996, before falling below the threshold for good. This party was also marred by

internal conflicts, and went through several splits before and after its spell in parliament. Before falling out, the Republicans had polled more below than above the threshold, but opinion polls probably underestimated their actual support.

Failed flash parties

Six flash parties have failed – of these four Slovak parties, one Czech and one Hungarian. Three of the Slovak flash parties as well as the single Czech party were fairly new, populist parties that went straight into government, and dropped below the threshold in the opinion polls well before the next election. The leftist Labour Union of Slovakia (ZRS) was founded by Ján Ľupták, an ex-communist MP. The party was registered in April 1994 and won representation in September, but polled below the threshold for the first time less than a year later. The Party of Civic Understanding (SOP) was founded by Rudolf Schuster in February 1998, but lost much of its raison d'être when he became president in June 1999, and it polled below the threshold from January 2000. The liberal-leaning Alliance for the New Citizen (ANO) was founded by media mogul Pavol Rusko in May 2001. In the summer of 2005 a corruption scandal caused a split that sent the party plummeting on the opinion polls in September. The Czech Public Affairs (VV) polled over the five-percent mark from February 2010 to April 2011 only; its downfall was due to internal squabbles and a bribery scandal.⁷

The final two parties failed from opposition and belonged to the extreme left and the extreme right. The Hungarian Justice and Life Party (MIÉP) was founded in 1993, when internal tensions within the MDF culminated in the expulsion of its extreme right wing led by the writer István Csurka. It was the only successful new party in Hungary in the 1990s, winning 14 seats in 1998, but it fell below the electoral threshold in 2002 because of an increase in overall turnout rather than a drop in the total number of MIÉP votes (Enyedi 2006). It had polled below the threshold most of the election period, but again, opinion polls probably underestimated the party's support. The orthodox Communist party (KSS) was founded already in 1991, but crossed the threshold first when it emerged as the only viable leftist alternative immediately before the 2002-election. Throughout the election period KSS support fluctuated around the five-percent mark, but its window of opportunity closed when Smer-SD emerged as the major leftist alternative in the run-up to the 2006 election.

To sum up: more than two thirds of the failed parties fell below the electoral threshold after only one or two spells in parliament. Most of the 23 parties had been small all along, but six of the failed long-term parties used to be large or medium-sized. In most cases, electoral

failure was a foregone conclusion: eleven parties dropped permanently below the threshold more than a year before the election and another six between four and eleven months before. The remaining six saw their support drop below the threshold in the last few months, or had hovered around five per cent for some time when they failed.

We now turn to what happened to the party organisation and the parliamentary elites after the party fell below the threshold for representation. Why did some parties become defunct within one election period of falling out, while others not only survived, but were able to return after a spell outside parliament? And to what extent were the parliamentary elites able to flee to greener pastures in time to get re-elected for a different party?

3. What happens to the party organisation when parties fail?

While electoral failure can be dated quite precisely, party decline – and ultimately demise – is a more gradual process. First, as we have seen, decline often sets in before the party fails to win re-election, and second, it usually takes some time for a party to disappear entirely.

Hence, we need criteria by which to assess the vitality of the party organisation. We propose a cumulative set of criteria: (1) whether the party still exists formally, as shown by the central party register; (2) whether the party ran in the latest parliamentary election; and (3) whether the party is currently represented in popularly elected bodies (at European, national, or regional level). The idea is to distinguish between failed parties that exist on paper or not at all, failed parties that have a minimum of activity, and failed parties that participate in decision-making bodies beyond the local level. The results are set out in table 2.

A majority of the 23 failed parties are either defunct or maintain a twilight existence, and unsurprisingly, the fifteen parties that failed *before* 2010 are on average in a worse state of decay than parties that failed later. All in all, 15 parties have ceased to exist or maintain a ‘zombie-like’ existence; of these, three failed in 2010. In contrast, five of the seven parties that are still represented at the regional, national or European level failed in 2010 or later.

Three distinct patterns can be observed: first, four of the Slovak parties that fell below the threshold in 2002 merged wholesale with parties of similar ideology. On the centre-left, the SDL and SOP merged with Smer; on the centre-right the DÚ and the DS merged with the SDKÚ. The DÚ merged with the SDKÚ without running for election first, the other three mergers took place less than one election period after the party failed. Likewise, the autonomist HSD-SMS merged formally with two other small centrist parties in the Czech

Moravian Centre Union (ČMUS) in late 1996, after having cooperated with these parties since 1994. A new round of mergers culminated in the formation of *Moravané* in 2005, a minuscule party that got 0.2 per cent in the 2010 election (Springerová 2010).

Table 2. Failed parties by present status as per 2014

Some representation		Some activity	Defunct	
In parliament	In EP/regional assemblies	Ran in latest national election	Ceased to exist	Merged
KDNP (faction)	SMK	KSS (but got under 1%)	HZDS	DS (to SDKÚ-DS)
KDU-ČSL	SNS	MIÉP (only 13 candidates)	SzDSz	SDĽ (to Smer-SD)
VV (on the list of Úsvít)	SZ (regions only)	FKgP (only 2 candidates)	ANO	SOP (to Smer-SD)
	SZS* (regions only)	MDF**	US-DEU	
		ZRS*** (1 candidate)	SPR-RSC	DÚ (to SDKÚ-DS)
			ODA	HSD-SMS (Moravané)

Own compilation. Parties that fell below the electoral threshold in the latest national election (2010 in Hungary, 2012 in Slovakia, 2013 in the Czech Republic) in bold.

* Since 2002, the SZS has mostly run as a part of alliances, at national and sub-state level, but it ran on its own in 2012 and obtained 0.4 per cent of the votes.

** MDF was formally dissolved 8 April 2011, and lost its representation in the European Parliament when its only MEP Lajos Bokros refused to join the legal successor JESZ. JESZ registered for the 2014 national election; Bokros' Movement for a Modern Hungary (MOMA) registered for the 2014 EP election.

*** ZRS is represented only at the municipal level, and has not submitted any annual reports since 2008. Its founder and chairman Ján Ľupták ran on the list of KSS in 2012.

Second, some parties faded slowly into oblivion or simply collapsed, and are today defunct or maintain a ‘zombie-like’ existence. According to the central party register, three failed Czech parties are officially defunct. The two centre-right parties ODA and US-DEU went bankrupt and dissolved voluntarily (in late 2007 and early 2011, respectively). Both had been part of the victorious Four-Coalition in the 1998 and 2000 Senate elections, and the US-DEU subsequently ran in the Coalition (with the KDU-ČSL). Neither party had many members. The ODA peaked at 2925 in 1998, the year it fell below the threshold, while the US-DEU had 3478 members in 2002, but was down to a mere 777 when it fell below the threshold in 2006 (Linek 2004).⁸ The extreme rightist Republicans (SPR-RSC) had their

activity suspended by court order in December 2010 and were deregistered in 2013. Since they fell below the threshold in 1998, the Republicans went bankrupt (in 2001), reorganized, merged, ran alone and on the list of another (nationalist) party, all to no avail. After the bankruptcy, the successor, Republicans of Miroslav Sládek (RMI) apparently had around 1000 members (Mareš 2005, 1596). Two of the long-standing parties that failed in 2010 are already defunct: The SzDSz in Hungary collapsed well before the 2010 election. Its membership fell from 26,827 in 2006 to a mere 1100 in 2010, with 2009 as the *annus horibilis*.⁹ In 2011, the party was engaged in a complete revision of strategy and all but disappeared from the political scene, and in late 2013 it was formally dissolved. In contrast, at 28,873 the HZDS still had the largest membership in Slovakia when it failed, but by the end of 2012 it had lost 85 percent of its members; in the 2012 election it polled a meagre 0.9 percent, and in January 2014 it was formally dissolved and subsequently de-registered. ANO, another Slovak party, never de-registered, but 2007 seems to be the last year with any activity, judging by the annual financial reports to the Slovak parliament. In late 2011 Pavol Rusko transferred the rights to Eleonóra Mojsejová, enabling her to run (unsuccessfully) for election in 2012 without having to collect the 10,000 signatures required to found a new party.

Four parties are zombies. The ZRS in Slovakia failed already in 1998, but kept stubbornly going, and fielded a full list (150 names) as late as the 2010 election. However, registered membership was down to 32 by the end of 2008, and the party has not submitted any financial reports since then. In 2012, the chairman Ján Ľupták ran on the KSS list. The two Hungarian parties that failed in 2002, MIÉP and FKgP, maintain skeleton web-sites, but are otherwise completely absent from the political scene: MIÉP picked up a total of 2,345 votes in the 2010 election, FKgP took 381 votes, and its splinter Torgyán Smallholder Coalition took 3,079 votes (recent membership figures are unavailable, but the party did register for the 2014 election). MDF, the last of the four, was all but defunct by 2014. It reorganised under the new name Welfare and Freedom Democratic Community (JESZ) in 2011, but although it registered for the 2014 election the new party never moved beyond a ‘zombie-like’ status. MDF’s single MEP – Lajos Bokros – refused to join JESZ, and formed a new market liberal party in April 2013 to contest the 2014 EP election.

Finally, three of the parties that failed before 2010 and five of the parties that failed in 2010 or later have maintained some representation and/or activity. Best off are the Czech Christian Democrats, who returned to the lower house in 2013. After they failed in 2010, they won re-election to the Senate twice, in 2010 and 2012; they are represented at the EU level as

well as in the regional assemblies, where they won 7.9 per cent of the seats in 2012, and they are second only to the Communists in membership. The KDNP in Hungary is in a halfway house between merger and coalition. This party fell below the threshold in 1998 after splitting, but re-united under the Fidesz banner before the 2006 election and now operates as a party within a party. It has maintained membership at a pretty high level, with 15,500 members in 2011. The third failed party that is represented in the national legislature is Public Affairs. It did not run for election in 2013, but had three MPs elected on the list of the new populist party Úsvít (Dawn of direct democracy). However, the present electoral support is close to zero, and its membership was down to 816 in early 2013.

Two failed Slovak parties are represented at the regional as well as at the European level: the SNS (which failed for the second time in 2012) and the SMK, both with a stable support between three and five per cent. The SMK still has twice as many members as the other Hungarian party in Slovakia, Most–Híd, and did much better in the regional elections in 2013, with 8.3 per cent of the seats. The two failed Green parties are represented at the regional level; the Slovak Greens only barely so after the 2013 elections, in which they won but one seat. With 712 members at the end of 2011 and electoral support well below one percent they are close to zombie status. The Czech Greens are stronger both in terms of membership and electoral support. The last party with some activity is the KSS, which runs for election at all levels, scores higher on the polls (1–3 per cent) and has more members than the Slovak Greens (5250 in 2012), but is represented only at the municipal level.

To summarize: while all elite strategies have been employed, sometimes in sequence, the dominant strategy of the failed parties has clearly been to return to the parliament, either on their own or as part of an electoral alliance. The latter is clearly contingent on the existence of ideologically related parties of a viable size and open to cooperation. In the end, many parties closed down or merged, but generally only after other strategies had been tried (and failed). Merger was the preferred strategy only of the SDL and the DÚ elites, who found a new ideological home in Smer and the SDKÚ, respectively. The survival of the party organisation indeed seems to have been a core value for an important part of the failed parties' elites, while there is so far little to suggest that the elites sacrificed their party to save their political career.

4. Where do MPs go when their party fails?

If political elites are rational, utility-maximizing actors whose main concern is their political career, we would expect the MPs of failing parties to flee to other, more viable parties.

However, in order to do so, they must be able to predict their old party's demise in time to get nominated on the list of a different party. We would therefore expect the MPs of parties that dropped below the five-percent mark in the opinion polls early in their last election period to be more likely to win re-election than the MPs of parties that collapsed closer to the election. The respective election laws stipulate that candidates or candidate lists must be registered at least 23 (Hungary), 66 (Czech Republic) or 90 (Slovakia) days before the election,¹⁰ and some of the parties that might provide new homes for the MPs have rather time-consuming nomination processes. An educated guess would therefore be that an MP should make the transfer at least a year prior to the election to be able to win re-election for his new party.

Table 3. Re-election of MPs of failed parties (in absolute numbers)

Elected when?	Below threshold in opinion polls more than one year before electoral failure				Below threshold in opinion polls less than one year before electoral failure				
	Party	# of MPs	# re-elected	for whom	Elected when?	Party	# of MPs	# re-elected	for whom
1990	SZS	6	1	SNS	1990	DS	7	2	SNS, HZDS
1992	HSD-SMS	14	1	ČSSD	1996	ODA	13	2	Four Coalition
1994	KDNP	22	7	Fidesz	1998	SDL	23	1	Smer (Fico)
1998	SOP	13	2	HZDS, ANO	2006	SMK	20	5	Most–Híd
1998	FKgP	48	11	Fidesz, MDF	2006	KDU-ČSL	13	2	TOP 09
1998	DÚ*	12	3	SDKÚ					
2010	VV	24	3	ČSSD, Úsvít	1996	SPR-RSC	18	0	
1994	ZRS	13	0		1998	SNS	14	0	
1998	DS, SZS*	2	0		1998	MIÉP	14	0	
2002	US-DEU	9	0		2002	KSS	11	0	
2002	ANO	15	0		2006	SZ	6	0	
2006	SzDSz	20	0		2006	HZDS	15	0	
2006	MDF	11	0		2010	SNS	9	0	
Total		209	28	(13.4 %)	Total		163	12	(7.4%)

*Part of SDK. Source: the authors' dataset.¹¹ Average re-election rate 10.8% (40 of 372).

The results are set out in table 3. First, if the MPs of failing parties tried to flee to more viable parties, they were not very successful. Less than 11 per cent were re-elected for a different party, and in half of the failed parties, nobody won re-election. By contrast, the average re-election rate of all three countries is between 40 and 50 per cent. Moreover, only

one single MP made comeback for a different party after a spell out of parliament: a former SDL MP returned on the Smer-SD ticket in 2006, after the two parties had merged the year before. The short answer is therefore that MPs go nowhere interesting when their parties fail. Most of them are simply forced to – or choose to – leave politics at the national level.

Second, the MPs of failed parties that dropped below the five-percent mark less than one year before the election were, as expected, the least successful. Only 7.4 per cent of these MPs were re-elected (upper right cell). In most cases, it was largely their leaving that caused their old parties to fall below the threshold. The KDU-ČSL and SMK elites that were re-elected (for TOP 09 and Most–Híd) left at a time when their old parties were comfortably above the electoral threshold in the opinion polls. Robert Fico's leaving the SDL to found Smer in late 1999 is an earlier example of the same: his old party started to lose support only after Smer was established. As for the ODA, which collapsed only a couple of months before the 1998 election, the two MPs who were re-elected as senators later that year won their seats as a part of the Four Coalition, and thus did not change party. The same goes for the two MPs from VV who were re-elected on the Úsvít list in 2013 based on an agreement between the respective party elites. Even in the one important case (upper left cell) where the re-elected MPs left *after* their old party had dropped below the five-percent mark – the FKgP – it was the internal struggle in the FKgP that got the party into trouble with the voters as well as caused a faction to leave for Fidesz (and one for MDF).

However, it was not always possible for any of the failed party's MPs to win re-election, even when they knew well in advance that their party would fail (lower left cell), and it seems that it became successively more difficult to win re-election as the Millennium wore on. The parties that failed between 2006 and 2013 had a total of 153 MPs, but only ten MPs belonging to the SMK, the KDU-ČSL and the VV managed to win re-election.

Why was it so difficult for the MPs of failed parties to win re-election, and why did it become more difficult over time to make a comeback on a different ticket? More specifically, why were none of the MPs of the failed parties in the lower, left cell in table 3 able to win re-election? We argue that this had everything to do with opportunity structure. The MPs of hard nationalist or extreme left parties did not really have anywhere to go, but why did not the members of mainstream parties find a home elsewhere? In the MDF's case, part of the explanation is that those who were prepared to leave and join Fidesz had done so four years earlier (11 crossed the floor and were re-elected for Fidesz in 2006). In the case of SzDSz, the new Green party (the LMP) effectively banned SzDSz members, and the other new home for

SzDSz candidates, MDF, failed to cross the five-percent threshold. In the case of the US-DEU, the most likely new home (the ODS) was simply not interested in nominating MPs from other parties, as it had plenty of talent in its own ranks.¹² It probably did not help that the US-DEU had originated as a split-off from the ODS, or that the US-DEU was in government with the ODS archenemy, the Social Democrats, at the time of its collapse. Finally, the new home for the liberal ANO elites, the Free Forum (SF), never made it to the parliament.

5. Explaining survival after failure: organisation, resources and opportunity structure

The 23 cases examined in the two previous sections indicate that most failed parties have sought to struggle on as organisations – alone or in alliances – and that comparatively few individual MPs have managed to continue their parliamentary career in new political homes. The decision to stay or leave, and particularly whether to seek an alliance or to go it alone, are the key choices elites face about the future of their organisation. But their success depends on three factors that the elites of failed parties have relatively little control over: the strength of the existing organisation; the rules of the game; and the opportunity structure they face in terms of whether other parties are prepared to work with them.

First, to test the expectation that organisationally robust parties might be more likely to survive after they fall below the threshold, we use party membership as a proxy for organisational strength. This is by no means a perfect substitute for the kind of factors that are often cited in the literature, such as regular party congresses, material and personal resources, and nationwide organisational presence and activity (Basedau & Stroh 2008: 12). Comparable data are difficult to come by for parties that failed in the 1990s and early 2000s; however, for parties which we have data for, there is a fairly good match: parties with few members tend to have few branches and shallow organisation; parties with many members have more branches, are organized at more levels (typically regional, district and local), and field more lists in elections at the local and regional level. As expected, parties with many members at the time of failure were much more likely to survive their first election period ‘out in the cold’: 11 of 13 did, compared to less than half of the parties with low membership (table 4). However, a strong organisation is neither necessary nor sufficient for long-term survival: more than half of the 11 have later become defunct or maintain a ‘zombie-like’ existence – notably the HZDS, the FKgP and SPR-RSC, and two parties merged shortly after falling below the

threshold, despite substantial membership (SDL¹³ and HSD-SMS). Finally, three parties have survived for more than two election periods below the threshold with rather small organisations (the ODA and the Czech and Slovak Greens).

Table 4. Parties that failed between 1992 and 2010 by membership, electoral support and status

	Survived 1 period+	Of these, defunct or zombies today	Did not survive 1 period +	Of these, mergers
high membership + over eligibility threshold	9	4	0	0
high membership, under eligibility threshold	2	2	2	2
low membership, over eligibility threshold	1	0	0	0
low membership, under eligibility threshold	3	2 (+ 1 near)	5	3

Czech and Slovak parties that failed in 2012 and 2013 are not included. High membership=over 10,000 in the Czech Republic and Hungary; over 7500 in Slovakia. Over eligibility threshold for state subventions=1 percent in Hungary, 1.5 percent in the Czech Republic, 3 percent in Slovakia. See appendix 3 for details.

Second, the rules of the game favour electorally stronger parties and punish electorally weaker parties, even after they have fallen below the electoral threshold. All three states provide some finance for parties that fail, but only if they pass the eligibility threshold: In Hungary, parties that obtain more than one per cent of the vote in the first round are eligible, in Slovakia a party needs three per cent, while the threshold in the Czech Republic varies: 1.5 per cent to receive reimbursement of electoral expenses (election years only), and three per cent to receive funding of operations. Beyond that, party funding is based on votes and seats, privileging parliamentary over non-parliamentary and large over small parties. Unlike the other two countries, the Czech Republic also provides subventions for parties that win seats at the regional level (see also Appendix 2). The other side of the coin is the requirements parties have to fulfil to run for election. The original election laws of all three countries were geared towards endorsement from the citizens. Hungary required 750 signatures per candidate – a staggering 132,000 signatures to run in all 176 single member constituencies; the Czechoslovak election law stipulated that parties must have at least 10,000 members to run (or collect signatures to make up the rest). The current Czech and Slovak rules require that

parties pay a deposit that is returned only if the party obtains more than five and two per cent, respectively.¹⁴ This means that the smallest parties are punished twice. Because state funding tends to be the single most important source of income, we would expect parties that fall below the eligibility threshold for state subventions to be less likely to survive. And they are. Of the parties that failed before 2012, twelve did not make the eligibility threshold. Of these, seven were defunct within one election period of failing and one less than a year into the next period. Of the remaining four, one is today defunct and three are zombies or perilously close (the SZS). Of the ten parties that failed in 2010 or earlier but crossed the eligibility threshold for state subventions, three returned to parliament (one failed again later), three still have a functioning party organisation, two are zombies, and two are defunct.

Parties that failed by a narrow margin are also in a better position to take advantage of alternative venues of competition, especially if they have geographically concentrated support and a strong organisation with many members. Contrary to the common observation that majoritarian systems tend to be detrimental to small parties, the majoritarian aspect of the electoral system for the Hungarian parliament and the Czech Senate allows a party to win representation without polling five per cent at the national level. In 1998, the MDF fell below the threshold for PR mandates, but won 17 seats in single member districts and was able to remain in parliament for another 12 years before failing in 2010. Likewise, after falling below the threshold for representation to the lower house in May 2010, the KDU-ČSL won Senate seats in its Moravian strongholds in the 2010 and 2012 elections, by attracting enough centre-right votes in the second round to defeat social democratic candidates. In a similar vein, the bloc vote used in municipal and regional elections in Slovakia favours parties with concentrated support and high membership. In the local elections a few months after their failure in 2002 and 2010, respectively, the SDL won 7.5 percent of the seats, the HZDS 5.9 and the SMK 5.7 percent of the seats. However, the bloc vote makes it difficult for the smaller parties to win election on their own. This might help explain why many Slovak parties turn more quickly to seek alliances and mergers, and why small parties in general seek alliances.

Third, however, if a merger or alliance is to be successful, it requires the cooperation of prospective partners. Assuming that offers of alliances or mergers are based on ideological closeness, we would expect failed mainstream parties to have more potential partners than extremist parties. The empirical evidence bears this out: all the successful mergers have been between ideologically close parties. The electoral support of the parties that were ‘swallowed up’ by Smer and SDKÚ was negligible at the time of the merger, but

they had other assets. SDĽ had a social democratic pedigree; substantial property inherited from the communist period (about 50 million Sk worth); representation in regional assemblies; and a large network of local and regional branches. However, Smer was not interested in the most compromised leaders, and all SDĽ members had to re-register. About half of the 9800 members did. In return, former SDĽ elites got positions in the Smer leadership and slots high enough on the ballot for the 2006 election to be elected. The other small parties that merged with Smer had less to offer, and got less in return (Kopeček 2007, 200–201). The same logic applies to the integration of the DÚ and DS in the SDKÚ. High coalition potential is also a plausible explanation for the survival of small mainstream centrist parties like the Slovak Greens, and the persistence of the ODA and DS for a decade after falling below the threshold for the first time. The ODA allied with other centre-right parties in the Four Coalition in the regional elections of 2000 and the Senate elections in 1998 and 2000, in the latter case for a six-year term. Likewise, having won representation in 1990 only due to the lower, three-percent threshold in that election, the SZS (and the DS) returned as a part of the SDK in 1998, and the SZS has since run on the lists of other parties twice in parliamentary elections.

In short, although organisation and resources may provide failing parties with a buffer against immediate demise, it is the quest for and offer of mergers or alliances (sometimes combined with alternative venues) that has provided the main lifeline for failed parties in the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary. The ideological proximity of many of the centrist Slovak parties (and their lack of other venues) explains the relatively high incidence of mergers, but alliances have not been uncommon among centrist parties in the Czech Republic either. In the Hungarian case, Fidesz offered an alliance to MDF and a quasi-merger to KDNP, effectively preventing the two parties' immediate demise, but the fact that all three 'bourgeois' parties had lost members or factions to Fidesz before they failed also helps explain Fidesz limited need for formal mergers.

Conclusion

Almost 60 percent of the parties that have won parliamentary representation in the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Hungary since the collapse of communism eventually failed. Of the 23 parties that have fallen below the electoral threshold, five (four of them Slovak) have merged with ideologically close neighbouring parties, ten have faded away slowly and are now defunct or maintain a 'zombie-like' existence, and eight have survived and maintain

some kind of activity. The latter include parties with representation in the European Parliament, the parliament or regional assemblies, as well one party that operates as a faction within another party. To be sure, five of these eight survivors are parties that failed in 2010 or later, so more additions to the list of mergers, deaths and zombies can be expected.

For most of these failed parties, the immediate strategic choice was to seek to fight another day. All failed parties ran in local elections a few months after the parliamentary elections, except the two that already merged (HSD-SMS and DU). Party elites seemed to prioritise survival of the party as an organisation as their core goal, with the pursuit of policy as a close second. In the end, many parties closed down, but only after other strategies had been tried (and failed). The Slovak mergers that strengthened SDKÚ-DS and Smer-SD represent the success stories – where parties' electoral failure was handled by mergers. In Hungary Fidesz' taking on board parts of three Christian national parties (and allowing KDNP to operate more or less as a Fidesz faction) represents a more one-sided version of the same. However, political elites of failed parties rarely have the option of simply 'crossing the floor' and joining a more successful organisation. Little more than one in ten MPs from failed parties have been re-elected for another party, and in most cases, this was a matter of party splits prior to (and thus causing) the party's decline rather than elites fleeing failed parties. Indeed, there is nothing to suggest that MPs behave like 'nomads' or 'political tourists'. Parties in decline lose their members, and growing parties attract new ones, but there is not much of a transfer market for elites.

How much of this comes down to idiosyncratic national factors, and how much might be applicable beyond these three cases and the peculiarities of post-communist politics? Post-communist party politics is sometimes held up as particularly unstructured, featuring weak organisations and mobile elites. The present empirical investigation suggests that this is not the case: to be sure, organisational strength and resources help parties survive longer after electoral failure, and might even make them attractive allies or targets or mergers, but there is nothing to suggest that lack of stability is associated with cross-party migration. If anything, post-communist party politics conforms to expectations derived from the comparative European party politics literature, both in terms of failure and what parties do when they fail. Small parties and divided parties are most at risk when it comes to electoral failure; and the most promising route out of this predicament is a merger or electoral alliance. In most cases, in post-communist Europe as in Western Europe, the consequence of electoral failure is political obscurity.

The broader conclusion about where parties can go when they ‘die’ concerns the strategic options that the leaders of failed parties face: if the Hungarian, Czech and Slovak cases are anything to go by the two crucial factors are alternative venues (single constituencies, an upper house, local government, the EP) and relations with ideologically compatible parties. Lacking alternative venues, but with close potential partners, the centrist Slovak parties opted for mergers (and across the border in Hungary, after much agonising, the KNDP finally settled for the functional equivalent). This may have involved making virtue of necessity, but it appears to be the most viable strategy for failed parties to maintain a long-term presence on the political scene. Moreover, in the three countries the quest for alliances was largely a matter of strategic choice in a given political space. This is in no sense a ‘post-communist peculiarity. Although some parties come and go, there is nothing to indicate that the relevance of political parties – as understood in the comparative West European literature – is limited in time or space to post-war Western Europe. The life and death of political parties – and indeed their life after death – are a matter of organisational management and alliance building.

Appendix 1. Results for parties that crossed the electoral threshold (%)

Czech Republic	1990	1992	1996	1998	2002	2006	2010	2013
Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (KSČM)	13.2	14.1	10.3	11.0	18.5	12.8	11.3	14.9
Czech Social Democrats (ČSSD)	4.1	6.5	26.4	32.3	30.2	32.3	22.1	20.5
Civic Democratic Party (ODS)		29.7	29.6	27.7	24.5	34.5	20.2	7.7
Christian Democrats (KDU-ČSL) ^a	8.4	6.3	8.1	9.0	14.3	7.2	4.4	6.8
Tradition – Responsibility – Prosperity (TOP 09)							16.7	12.0
Action of dissatisfied citizens (ANO2011)								18.7
Okamura's Dawn of direct democracy (Úsvít)								6.9
Greens (SZ)	4.1	^b	–	1.1	2.4	6.3	2.4	3.9
Public Affairs (VV)							10.9	–
Freedom Union (US-DEU)				8.6	^a	0.3	† 2011	
Civic Democratic Alliance (ODA)		5.9	6.4	–	0.5	–	† 2007	
Republicans (SPR-RSČ)	1.0	6.0	8.0	3.9	† 2001			
Moravian Autonomy Movement (HSD-SMS)	10.0	5.9	† 1994					
Liberal Social Union (LSU) ^b		6.5	†					
Civic Forum (OF)	49.5	†						
Slovakia	1990	1992	1994	1998	2002	2006	2010	2012
Christian Democratic Movement (KDH)	19.2	8.9	10.1	^e	8.3	8.3	8.5	8.8
Slovak Democratic and Christian Union (SDKÚ-DS)					15.1	18.4	15.4	6.1
Smer – Social Democrats (Smer-SD)					13.5	29.1	34.8	44.4
Bridge (Most-Híd)							8.1	6.9
Freedom and Solidarity (SaS)							12.1	5.9
Ordinary people and independents (OĽ'aNO)								8.6
Slovak National Party (SNS)	13.9	7.9	5.4	9.1	3.3	11.7	5.1	4.6
Hungarian Coalition Party (SMK) ^c	8.7	7.4	10.2	9.1	11.2	11.7	4.3	4.3
Movement for a democratic Slovakia (HZDS)		37.3	35.0	27.0	19.5	8.8	4.3	0.9
Communist Party of Slovakia (KSS)		0.8	0.8	2.8	6.3	3.9	0.8	0.7
Greens (SZ)	3.5	2.1	^d	^e	1.0	^d	^d	0.4
Alliance for the New Citizen (ANO)					8.0	1.4	†	
Labor Union of Slovakia (ZRS)			7.3	1.3	0.5	0.3	0.2	–
Democratic Left Party (SDL) – to Smer	13.4	14.7	10.4	14.7	1.4	† 2005		
Party of Civic Understanding (SOP) – to Smer				8.0	–	† 2003		
Democratic Party (DS) – to SDKÚ-DS	4.4	3.3	3.4	^e	–	† 2006		
Democratic Union (DÚ) – to SDKÚ-DS				8.6	^e	† 2000		
Slovak Democratic Coalition (SDK) ^e					26.3	†		
Public against Violence (VPN)	29.4	†						
Hungary	1990		1994	1998	2002	2006	2010	
Hungarian Socialist Party (MSzP)	10.9		33.0	32.9	42.1	43.0	19.3	
Hungarian Civic Union (Fidesz)	8.9		7.0	29.5	41.1	42.0	52.7	
Christian Democratic People's Party (KDNP) ^f	6.5		7.0	2.3	3.9	^f	^f	
Movement for a better Hungary (Jobbik)							16.7	
Politics Can Be Different (LMP)							7.5	
Hungarian Democratic Forum (MDF)	24.7		11.7	2.8	^g	5.0	2.7	
Alliance of Free Democrats (SzDSz)	21.4		19.7	7.6	5.6	6.5	0.0	
Independent Smallholders' Party (FKgP)	11.8		8.8	13.2	0.8	0.0	0.0	
Hungarian Justice and Life Party (MIÉP) ^h			1.6	5.5	4.4	2.2	0.0	

Parties that have crossed the 5 per cent electoral threshold (3 per cent in Slovakia and 4 per cent in Hungary in 1990) in at least one election. List votes in Hungary; elections to the Chamber of Deputies in the Czech Republic. Results in grey = the party was not represented in the parliament that period.

[†] Defunct.

^a *Czech Republic*: In 1990 an alliance of Christian Democratic Party (KDS), Christian Democratic movement and Czechoslovak People's Party (the two latter merged in 1991). Coalition of KDU-ČSL and US-DEU in 2002.

^b *Czech Republic*: The Greens were part of the loose electoral alliance Liberal Social Union in 1992, with an agrarian party and the Czech National Social Party (a former satellite party). The party did not run in 1996.

^c *Slovakia*: SMK is a merger of three Hungarian parties that ran together also in 1994, and two of them even in 1990.

^d *Slovakia*: The Greens ran in Common Choice (SpV) in 1994, with the SDĽ, the historical social democrats SDSS, and the Agrarian movement, but got no mandates. The party also participated in (unsuccessful) electoral alliances in 2006 and 2010.

^e *Slovakia*: The Greens, DÚ and DS ran in the Slovak Democratic Coalition (SDK) in 1998, with the historical social democrats SDSS and the Christian Democrats KDH. All parties got mandates.

^f *Hungary*: The KNDP split in 1997, had some MPs elected for Fidesz in 1998 and 2002, before re-uniting and running on a joint list with Fidesz in 2006 and 2010 (operating effectively as a faction within Fidesz).

^g *Hungary*: The MDF ran on a joint list with Fidesz in 2002; and thus won 24 seats.

^h *Hungary*: MIÉP ran with Jobbik in the 'Third Way' alliance in 2006.

Appendix 2. Rules for state subventions

	Reimbursement of electoral expenses	Funding of operation (annual)	Funding of operation (annual)
Czech Republic To be eligible	> 1.5% of the votes (lower house) or > 1% (European Parliament)	> 3% of the votes	at least one MP (deputy or senator) or member of regional assembly
	Calculated on the basis of votes	Lump sum + calculated on the basis of votes	Calculated on the basis of mandates
Slovakia To be eligible	> 3% of the votes + submitted financial report previous year	> 3% of the votes + submitted financial report previous year	Calculated on the basis of mandates.
	Calculated on the basis of votes	Calculated on the basis of votes	Higher per mandate for the first 20 MPs, then reduced by 1/3
Hungary To be eligible	> 1% of the votes	> 1% of the votes	> 1% of the votes
	Calculated per candidate in SMDs	25% of state subventions to parliamentary parties	75% of state subventions if party > 1% in first round, based on votes

Appendix 3. Failed parties according to membership and present status

Party	Electoral failure		Membership around failure		Survival Survived 1 period+	Present status		Last known membership data	
	Failed when?	Election result	members	Year		Defunct?	Year	Members	Year
SNS	2012	4.6	2412	2011		no		2335	2012
VV	2013	–	816	2013		no			
KDU-ČSL	2010	4.4	33,878	2010	yes	no		30,524	2012
SMK	2010	4.3	10,950	2009	yes	no		9800	2012
KSS	2006	3.9	8601	2006	yes	no		5250	2012
SNS	2002	3.3	13,000	2000	yes	no		2335	2012
SZ	2010	2.4	1874	2010	yes	no		1420	2012
KDNP	1998	2.3	26,500	1998	yes	no		15,500	2011
SZS	2002	1.0	900	2000	yes	no		12	2012
MIÉP	2002	4.4	11,200	2000	yes	zombie			
MDF	2010	2.7	11,000	2009	yes	zombie		11,000	2009
FKgP	2002	0.8	120,000	2000	yes	zombie			
ZRS	1998	1.3	ca 10,000	1998	yes	zombie		32	2008
HZDS	2010	4.3	30,949	2009	yes	yes	2014	4175	2012
SPR-RSČ	1998	3.9	ca 55,000	1996	yes*	yes	2010	ca 1000	2001
ODA	1998	–	2925	1998	yes	yes	2007	1550	2002
US-DEU	2006	0.3	777	2006	yes	yes	2011	321	2009
ANO	2006	1.4	3928	2006	no	yes	2011	3928	2007
SDL	2002	1.4	21,223	2000	no	yes	2005	9800	2004
HSD-SMS	1996	0.5	10,000	1995	no	yes	1996		
SzDSz	2010	–	5300	2009	no	yes	2013	1100	2010
DS	2002	–	1800	2002	no	yes	2006	1700	2005
SOP	2002	–	5900	2000	no	yes	2003	5900	2000
DÚ	2002	–	4486	2000	no	yes	2000	4486	2000

Membership figures for the ZRS and the SPR-RSČ may not be very reliable. Membership in the SDL, SNS and the FKgP surely went down after the splits in 2001–2002, but data for 2002 were not available in either case. The membership figures for the HSD-SMS are for the merged party (ČMUS).¹⁵

– party did not run. SOP had a few candidates on the list of the SDL in 2002.

* The original Republicans (SPR-RSČ) went bankrupt in 2001. The party that was suspended by court order in 2010 was a merger of various split-offs from the original party, including Miroslav Sládeček's Republicans (RMS), which was the main successor. The chairman of the original as well as the 2010 party was Miroslav Sládeček. We have therefore decided to treat this as one party.

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Notes

¹ The share of failed parties is even larger in the fourth Visegrád country, Poland (more than 75 percent), but most of these were small post-Solidarity parties that failed in the second free election in 1993, and for which information is not available. We therefore decided to leave out Poland. For an in-depth analysis of one of the (more substantial) failed Polish parties, see Maria Wincławska, ‘Why do parties fail? The Freedom Union – political party in post-communist Poland’ (unpublished manuscript). In the 15 European states that have been democratic continuously since the Second World War, parties that won representation in the first post-war elections still polled on average just under 61% of the vote almost seven decades later. As per our calculations, of the 199 parties that won representation with more than a single seat at some point in these states, 101 were still represented in some form in 2013 (and more than half of that failed cases were concentrated in France and Italy).

² Both the 2013 article and the present article are in part based on a dataset and party interviews that were collected for a larger elite project comprising Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Hungary. The authors wish to thank party headquarter staff for their generous assistance and provision of information. Opinion data are from CVVM, ÚVVM, Factum Invenio, Focus, and Medián. We would like to thank Ondrej Gažovič, Ol'ga Gyárfášová and Dániel Róna for help in obtaining opinion data. Previous versions were presented at the NOPSA conference in Vasa, at the ECPR conference in Reykjavík, and at the Comparative Politics seminar at the Department of Political Science, University of Oslo, all in 2011. The penultimate version was presented at the National Political Science conference in Trondheim, 4–6 January 2012. We thank the participants and two anonymous reviewers for useful comments.

³ Until now, 176 of the 386 seats have been elected by majority vote. From 2014 onwards, this is changed to 106 seats in a 199-seat assembly.

⁴ 2012 *Political Finance Database*, at International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA), <http://www.idea.int/political-finance/index.cfm> (accessed 15 March, 2013).

⁵ Because our focus is on failed *parties* that were at some point *politically relevant*, we have decided to leave out independents and minor parties that only won seats in single member constituencies in Hungary and the Czech Senate, as well as umbrella movements and electoral alliances. There were two such movements: Civic Forum and Public against Violence (both fell apart in 1991), and two alliances: the Liberal Social Union and the Slovak Democratic Coalition. The Hungarian Coalition is included because it was turned into a party in 1998.

⁶ Author's interview with Petr Hrdina, deputy general secretary of the Czech Greens, 4 December 2008.

⁷ The party was admittedly registered already in 2002, but its activity was confined to Prague until 2009.

⁸ *Výroční finanční zpráva Unie Svobody–Demokratické Unie 2009*. Příloha k účetní závěrce, <http://www.unie.cz/> (accessed 15 March 2013).

⁹ Hungarian Political Yearbook, various years.

¹⁰ In Hungary, each candidate in single member districts needs the endorsement of 750 voters. The deadline for signatures is 23 days before the election. See *Act No. XXXIV of 1989 on the Election of the Members of Parliament* and *Act C of 1997 on Electoral Procedure (abstract issue)*, National Election Office http://www.valasztas.hu/nep97/jo/to/vjt_en.htm and http://www.valasztas.hu/en/onkval2010/347/347_1_4.html (accessed 20 March 2013). The Czech Republic: Zákon č. 247/1995 Sb., o volbách do Parlamentu České republiky in *Sbírka zákonů 247/1995*, <http://aplikace.mvcr.cz/sbirka-zakonu/start.aspx>, current version (with amendments) available at <http://portal.gov.cz/app/zakony/?path=/portal/obcan/>. Slovakia: Zákon z 13. mája 2004 o volbách do Národnej rady Slovenskej republiky in *Zbierka zákonov 333/2004*, <http://www.zbierka.sk/> (accessed 15 March, 2013).

¹¹ Dataset containing information on all MPs elected between 1990 and 2010 in Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary. The data have been gathered from publications of the four parliaments and with the help of their information services. Printed sources: *Národná rada Slovenskej Republiky*. I., II., III. volebné obdobie. (Bratislava: Kancelária Národnej rady Slovenskej Republiky, 1996, 1999, 2003); *Slovenská Národná rada*. VIII., IX., X. volebné obdobie. (Bratislava: Kancelária Slovenskej národnej rady, 1986, 1990, 1992); *Federální shromáždění ČSSR*, V. volební období, (Praha, 1986); *Federální shromáždění České a slovenské federativní republiky*, VI. volební období, (Praha, 1991); *Federální shromáždění ČSFR*, VII. volební období (Praha, 1992); *Česká národní rada v V., VI., VII. volební období*, (Praha: Česká národní rada, 1986, 1990, 1992).

¹² Author's interview with Jan Kočí, ODS general secretary, 2 June 2008.

¹³ The actual membership in the SDL was probably closer to 10,000 than to 20,000 after the split in 2002.

¹⁴ Originally, this deposit was huge: 200,000 Czech crowns per constituency (around 7800 euro), later reduced to 15,000 per constituency (about 7700 euro for all 14 constituencies put together) in elections to the lower house and 20,000 in the Senate elections. The deposit in Slovakia was 16,596 euro as per 2011 (§ 18 in the election law).

¹⁵ Membership data: Figures for VV 2013 were found in Ihned, 20 February 2013. End of 2012 figures for the Czech Republic were provided by party headquarters; end of 2012 figures for Slovakia retrieved from Annual reports, available at the webpage of the Slovak parliament. Hungarian data are from Hungarian Political Yearbook, based on data provided by the parties. Other sources: Ondrušová, 2000: 52, Kopeček, 2007: 202, 230, 374; Mareš, 2005: 1596, Linek, 2004: table 1; Springerová 2010: 129, note 148.