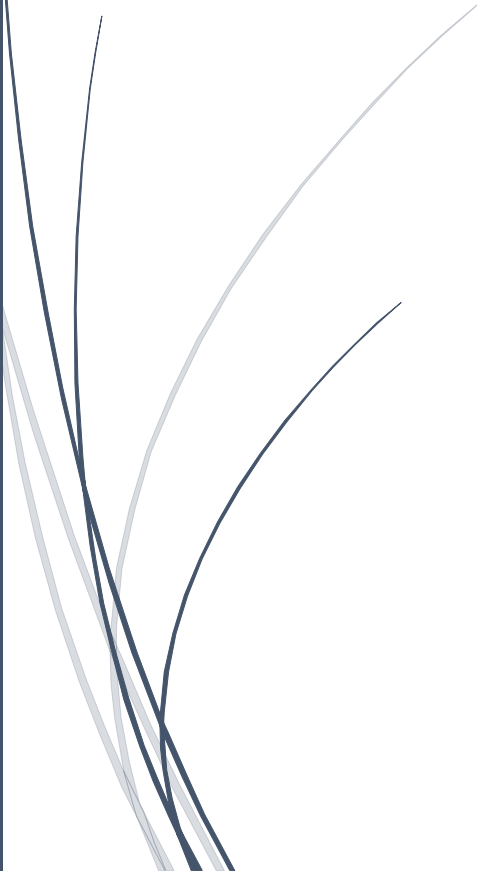




June 11th, 2018

# The Czech Pirate Party

Is intra-party democracy decreasing following the party's recent electoral success?



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**Word Count:** 9,998

## Introduction

Despite the notable spread of multi-party electoral democracies to areas such as Central and Eastern Europe or Latin America, voters in both long-established and newer democracies have started to display a growing ambivalence towards partisan electoral institutions (Scarrow and Webb, 2017, p. 2). Contrary to Schattschneider's (1942, p. 1) belief that democracies have to be built around political parties, many seem to think otherwise. Hence, there has been a significant decline in the extent to which voters identify with political parties. It has been increasingly difficult for parties to mobilize constituencies and get them to cast a vote in their favor (Allern and Pedersen, 2007, p. 69). The drop in popularity has been especially pronounced in the archetypal mass membership parties (Bardi, Colossi and Pizzimenti, 2017, p. 62), represented for instance by Social and Christian Democracies throughout Europe. Associated with the decline in traditional party membership is a concomitant increase in the electoral appeal of small or entirely new parties. Strikingly, more than 40% of electoral volatility in recent European elections can be explained by the defection of voters toward smaller parties (Hix and Marsh, 2007). Studies find a fascinating eight-fold increase in the number of new parties between 1970 and 2010 (Bardi, Colossi and Pizzimenti, 2017, p. 74). The increasing disaffection with established parties is by no means confined only to the established democracies of Western Europe; it can also be seen in Central and Eastern Europe (e.g. Sikk, 2005). This is apparently at odds with the institutional reality on the ground. Despite the perceived apartisan mass behavior, political parties remain the key actor in politics, especially at the national level. Parties control ballot access, decide which candidate or policy has a higher chance of being elected, and often receive state subsidies to ensure their continued operation into the future (Scarrow and Webb, 2017, p. 3).

While attracting potential voters, new parties may opt for innovative organizational structures. They might maximize inclusiveness, allowing wider sections of society to become party members, and involving them into intra-party decision-making more substantially than in established parties. This work focuses on the Pirate parties, whose ideology has been built around inclusiveness (Cammaerts, 2015), and the levels of intra-party democracy (IPD) they display.

More specifically, the Czech Pirate Party offers a highly relevant focus of analysis, as it has become the most electorally successful Pirate Party in the world following the 2017 Czech general election. The Czech Pirates gained 10.79% of the vote, securing 22 seats in the 200-seat Chamber of Deputies (Volby.cz, 2017). This made them the third strongest party in the lower house of the Czech parliament. Still, possibly due to the rather unexpected nature of the Pirates' success, very limited scholarly attention has been afforded to them. One of the very few exceptions is a spatial analysis of the party's voter support in elections prior to 2017 (Maškarinec, 2017). Studies primarily concerned with the party's organizational structure are even rarer, with the notable exception being an undergraduate thesis written by a former Deputy Chairman of the Pirate Party (Ferjenčík, 2017). However, such an effort can hardly be considered helpful, academically enriching, or indeed objective. Hence, my work seeks to bridge this gap in the existing literature, explicitly focusing on the organizational structure of the Czech Pirate Party. After all, as parties remain the dominant political actors (Scarrow and Webb, 2017, p. 3), a systematic study of their organizational structure is very relevant, for different organizational configurations might help produce different political outcomes. Due to the Czech Pirates' visibility following the electoral success, I would expect the other Pirate Parties to be tempted to replicate their organizational structure, and hence levels of IPD. Ultimately, findings relevant to the Czech Pirate party might even prove generalizable to other similar parties elsewhere.

I draw inspiration from Robert Michels' (1915) conclusion that even if a party appears to be internally democratic, it eventually ends up being dominated by the party elite, called oligarchy. The expectation was that, over time, this would happen in all parties, irrespective of party family; hence, the trend is labelled "the iron law of oligarchy" This would imply that the initial level of IPD is irrelevant, as the leadership eventually dominates. On the other hand, if Michels was not correct, it would be reasonable to expect different parties to maintain different levels of IPD. Given the Pirate Parties' strong emphasis on transparency and IPD, one would expect that if there is one party that would succeed in defeating the iron law of oligarchy, it would be the Pirates. Thus, I aim to answer the following research question:

**What is the extent of IPD in the Czech Pirate Party, and has it changed following its electoral success?**

I will begin the paper with a discussion of the theory behind IPD and the expectations of my study. Second, I elaborate on the research design used, noting some of its limitations and ways to tackle them. Third, I provide a brief outline of the rise of Pirate parties. Fourth, I conduct a systematic analysis of IPD in the Czech Pirate Party, using my original interviews as the backbone. Fifth, I provide an international comparison with the Swedish and German Pirate Parties, which further solidifies my findings<sup>1</sup>. The sixth section concludes and indicates avenues for further research.

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<sup>1</sup> I also compare the Czech Pirates to Beppe Grillo's Five Star Movement in Italy. However, because the party does not belong to the Pirate party family and thus is less relevant, it has been placed in Appendix A.

## Theoretical framework

Parties usually enjoy significant freedom in how they structure their internal organization and how they connect with potential members, voters, or supporters (Scarrow and Webb, 2017, p. 3). I argue that the organizational structure of (some) new parties is different from that of long-established parties, especially in relation to IPD. For parties such as the Pirate Parties, the new approaches can even become a significant part of their electoral appeal or ideology (Cammaerts, 2015; Scarrow and Webb, 2017, p. 4). In its classic conception, party leaders and elected representatives are held accountable through mid-level activists (Allern and Pedersen, 2007, p. 75), such as party congress delegates. Currently, however, with the rise of new technologies such as the Internet and social media, greater participation in internal party life – if allowed – appears to be easier than ever before. Policy or candidate deliberations and decisions can be made from the comfort of one’s favorite armchair, giving rise to the concept of “armchair membership” (Allern and Pedersen, 2007, p. 83). As parties are very likely motivated by vote maximization (Webb and Keith, 2017, p. 38), it is reasonable to suspect they will desire to utilize the advantages new technologies provide, and open the party organizations to a wider audience, so as to attract potential voters and members. That can mean two things. First, party members can get more involved in the internal party life, being allowed to deliberate upon potential policy or candidate choices with greater frequency, and vote on a wider array of internal party decisions. Second, this can ultimately lead to the blurring of differences between full-fledged party members, party supporters, and non-members or voters (Allern and Pedersen, 2007, p. 76).

### Concepts, expectations

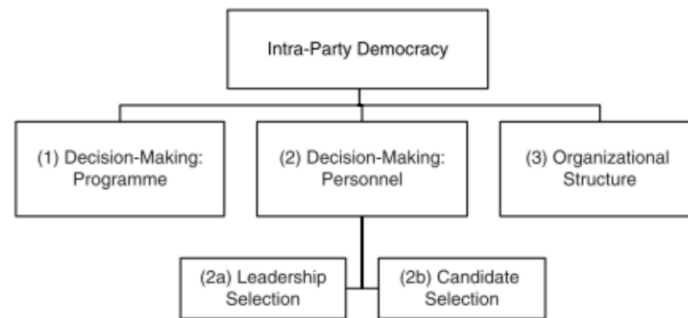
The main concept I work with in my study is **IPD**. For some, IPD may actually be difficult to conceptualize, as it essentially includes two dimensions: *assembly-based IPD* and *plebiscitary*

*IPD* (von dem Berge and Poguntke, 2017, p. 144). The former denotes the degree to which party members are included to deliberate on possible intra-party decisions, while the latter focuses on the extent to which party members can decide, through voting, which decision is taken. Research finds that only slightly more than half of studied parties use plebiscitary IPD measures, while almost all of them use some forms of assembly-based IPD (Bolin, Aylott and von dem Berge, 2017, p. 161). This is sensible, as political parties could hardly exist without any kind of internal deliberation (maybe except for the one-member party of Geert Wilders in the Netherlands). However, parties are more varied in who has the final say over a decision; whether the membership through a vote, or only the leadership. At any rate, I expect that the Pirates make the interplay between assembly-based and plebiscitary-based IPD easier, as both deliberation and voting can happen in the online sphere, potentially opening the process up to a wider array of members. Hence, the Czech Pirate Party should score relatively high on both assembly-based and plebiscitary IPD.

For simplicity, IPD should be defined in terms of the lowest-common denominator. Based on the existing literature, I therefore conceptualize IPD based on the level of the party's *inclusiveness*. A party is said to be more inclusive – and thus internally democratic “(i) the higher the number of party members involved in intra-party decision-making (relative to party size), (ii) the more open the election and composition of party organs (e.g., absence of ex officio seats), and (iii) the more the party leader shares power with other, more inclusive party organs or actors” (von dem Berge and Poguntke, 2017, p. 140). In other words, the level of IPD in a party denotes how many actors participate in making a given decision. I am primarily interested in: (1) the extent to which members have a say over the program; (2) the extent to which members can influence candidate selection; and (3) how the party is structured organizationally (e.g. what the powers of

the leadership are vis-à-vis the membership). My conceptualization of IPD is demonstrated in Figure 1.

*Figure 1: Conceptualization of IPD*



Source: (von dem Berge and Poguntke, 2017, p. 142)

IPD can be understood as both an independent and a dependent variable (Bolin, Aylott and von dem Berge, 2017). It is not clear whether a certain level of IPD *caused* a party's electoral success, or whether electoral success *causes an adjustment* in the level of IPD. Hence, extra caution should be applied when illuminating possible causal relationships. That is why I do not analyze whether certain levels of IPD caused electoral success. Rather, I examine the changes in IPD *following* electoral success. I also carefully differentiate between time periods before and after the success, and triangulate my findings using multiple sources. Interviews with the party leadership also help indicate the direction of the causal relationship by allowing me to ask any clarifying questions.

Parties insist on IPD either purely instrumentally, to set themselves apart from other parties, thereby increasing their appeal, or – as in the case of the Pirates – out of firm, almost ideological, devotion to the idea of inclusiveness and transparency. IPD can be understood to connect the state (represented by political parties) with society and allow citizens to have influence over the state

(*ibid.*, p. 158). It also provides a further source of legitimacy for policy and candidate selection done by the party. Some even argue that IPD may support the electoral success of parties and stimulate political participation (Scarow in von dem Berge and Poguntke, 2017, p. 137). Yet, for others, democracy within parties is an unwelcome obstacle (Schumpeter in *ibid.*). IPD can inhibit interest aggregation, pushing the party away from voter preferences or promoting intra-party disunity. Then, the party's collective preferences become unclear to the voters (Bolin, Aylott and von dem Berge, 2017, p. 159). I expect this might lead to a fall in the party's electoral success, as voters choose a more coherent alternative instead.

Parties align their organizational structure in a way they believe will bring the biggest electoral success. While they may be initially tempted to rely on IPD in doing so, I argue that the party leadership will still want to retain some degree of control over the party, and the insistence on IPD will fall following electoral success. May (1973) calls this "the law of curvilinear disparity". This tendency is more pronounced with newly-established parties – and especially following electoral success – than with established parties, for three reasons.

First, new parties need to build a constituency "from scratch"; they must attract potential voters to a previously unknown project. Their success in doing so depends on how effective the delivery of their message is (Harmel and Svåsand, 1993, p. 71). Ultimately, compared to older parties, new parties spend the first few years of their existence developing an identity. Older parties, on the other hand, are usually constrained by their past organizational choices (Panebianco in Scarow and Webb, 2017, p. 5). Such constraints do not apply so much to new parties, as they have only made a limited amount of past organizational choices. Thus, the leadership likely enjoys much more executive leverage in new parties. At the same time, new parties often operate in a procedural vacuum, as they have not had time to routinize their internal organizational rules



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(Harmel and Svåsand, 1993, p. 73). Those two factors combine to form a powerful incentive for the leaders to be authoritative.

Second, it could be argued that interest aggregation, one of the main aims of political parties, requires party leaders to be accountable to the voters, not the membership (Allern and Pedersen, 2007, p. 72). Through elections, voters reward or punish the party – and ultimately the leadership – for the choices the party has made. Hence, the leaders might be tempted to assume a more assertive role in the party, as a means of taking responsibility for those choices. In established parties, on the other hand, past organizational choices, a stable and differentiated support base, and stricter internal rules established over time, might restrict the latitude the leadership possesses.

Third, electoral success appears to be at least partly dependent on the party's organizational structure (Webb and Keith, 2017, p. 55). Hence, unexpected electoral success may exert pressure on the leadership, who naturally endeavors to augment or at least maintain that success in the future. Moreover, once elected, the complexity of the decisions the leadership faces increases, together with the need for swift actions. I expect similar organizational pressures to also apply in the Czech case. Now that the party has won significant parliamentary representation, its organizational structure has become more complex, not least with the creation of a parliamentary group and a possible influx of new members. Hence, infighting, or at least greater difficulty in policy deliberation and decision, is to be expected. This might motivate the leadership to reconsider the extent of membership autonomy it allows, and probably redefine the party's organizational structure.

This brings a significant dilemma. On the one hand, parties might be tempted to become more inclusive – thus relying more on intra-party democracy – to attract support. On the other,

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leaders may desire to assume a stronger position within the party. The way parties solve this dilemma places them on a spectrum, bounded by two extreme organizational models. On one end of the continuum is a party with a strictly authoritarian form of leadership, where decisions are taken exclusively top-down by the leadership. On the other end is a participatory model, where decisions are taken by the membership (Hartleb, 2007, p. 366).

The dilemma is especially pertinent for the Pirate Parties, as their emphasis on transparency and inclusiveness is very strong (Cammaerts, 2015). At the same time, however, they are a relatively new party family; the Swedish Pirate Party, the first-ever Pirate Party, was only established in 2006 (Bolleyer, Little and von Nostitz, 2015, p. 162). Hence, I would expect a more assertive role of the leadership, as the organizational structure of the party is not routinized. Moreover, future re-election of a new party is uncertain. Hence, the leadership possesses a powerful incentive to centralize decision-making at the expense of IPD.

## Research design

I conduct a qualitative, small-N observational study (Taylor, Bogdan and DeVault, 2015). Small-N studies are useful at analyzing aggregated units of analysis (Barakso, Sabet and Schaffner, 2013, p. 192), such as political parties. They are better suited to deal with real-world complexity and politics (ibid., p. 204).

More specifically, the paper is a single case study: “an intensive study of a single unit or a small number of units (the cases), for the purpose of understanding a larger class of similar units” (Gerring, 2011, p. 1138). Single case studies allow for an intensive examination of a given case (Bryman, 2016, p. 61). It is also pertinent when there are gaps in existing literature (Siggelkow, 2007, p. 21). Scholarly attention to the Czech Pirate Party is lacking as described above, despite

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its increasing relevance. Moreover, my theoretical framework – inspired by an existing analysis of the Swedish and German Pirate Parties (Bolleyer, Little and von Nostitz, 2015) – would be enriched if applied to a new, relevant case.

If, as I expect, electoral success affects IPD, this will be easier to observe in Pirate Parties, as their professed insistence on inclusiveness is substantial. Hence, a turn to centralization will constitute a significant change to the Pirates' organizational structure. Due to their electoral success, the Czech Pirates are a deviant case. Because my aim is to sharpen existing theory through its in-depth explanation, my focus on a single case is justified (Barakso, Sabet and Schaffner, 2013, p. 200).

I will use a combination of primary and secondary source analysis. While it might be problematic to find reliable data regarding the organizational structure in other parties (Scarrow and Webb, 2017, p. 11), this issue is minimized in case of the Pirates due to their insistence on transparency. This further justifies my case selection. Similarly to the Political Parties Database Project (Scarrow and Webb, 2017), I limit myself to the party's "official stories", such as party statutes or proclamations by the leadership. While they might not provide the full story, focusing on the wider context, e.g. deliberations among rank-and-file members, is outside the confines of this study. Moreover, I believe the "official story" provides reasonable boundaries to the real functioning of the party. I have conducted interviews with the party's top leadership: Ivan Bartoš (the Chairman), Jakub Michálek (Deputy Chairman and leader of the Parliamentary Group), and Mikuláš Ferjenčík (former Deputy Chairman, now Chairman of the Party's Media Committee). Because respondents for an interview should be chosen based on what they know (Aberbach and Rockman, 2002), interviewing the leadership is sensible. First, the leadership is likely to have the most complete information about the organizational structure of the party. More importantly,

interviewing the leadership can extend the “official story” beyond what is immediately apparent from party documents, allowing my conclusions to mirror reality more closely. Consequently, the interviews form the backbone of my analysis. The interview questions loosely mirrored IPD indices used to analyze data from the Political Party Database, as seen in Figure 2:

*Figure 2: Indices of assembly-based and plebiscitary IPD:*

	<b>Decision-making: Program</b>	<b>Decision-making: Personnel</b>	<b>Organizational structure</b>
<b>Possible questions guiding analysis: assembly-based IPD</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Who has the final say on the manifesto?</li><li>- Can party members influence the formation of a manifesto?</li><li>- How dominant is the leadership in the formation of a manifesto?</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Are rules for the selection of the party leader existent?</li><li>- Who has the final vote in the party leader selection process?</li><li>- Who is eligible to vote on personnel matters?</li><li>- Who has the final say in the candidate selection process?</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- How efficient is the party's internet discussion board?</li><li>- How open is internal party decision-making?</li><li>- How independent are elected representatives vis-a-vis the membership?</li></ul>
<b>Possible questions guiding analysis: plebiscitary IPD</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Do all party members have a vote on the manifesto?</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Do all party members have a vote in the party leader selection process?</li><li>- Do all party members have a vote on the lists of candidates?</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- No items</li></ul>

Inspired by: (von dem Berge and Poguntke, 2017, p. 152)

While the external validity of small-N studies may be limited, I have taken conscious steps to maximize the applicability of my findings. First, the Czech Pirates are studied using an existing framework, which helps generate clear expectations for my analysis. Second, the interviews with the leadership help to outline the causal relationship between electoral success and IPD. Third, the Czech Pirates constitute a most likely case: if, with their unprecedented insistence on IPD, even they prove unable to escape the iron law of oligarchy, other parties are also likely to fail. Fourth, I try to solidify the external validity by briefly comparing my conclusions to similar parties in Europe. If they prove consistent, the generalizability of this study increases.

## The emergence of Pirate parties

In the political realm, the term *piracy* entered the public sphere at the end of the twentieth century to denote unlawful actions against intellectual property owners (Uszkai, 2012, p. 47). The rise of the Pirate movement was a direct response to the passing of contentious legislation in

Sweden which, among others, criminalized online file sharing, allowed the monitoring of emails, and pressured Internet service providers to conduct surveillance on their customers (Burkart, 2014, p. 4). The first Pirate Party was established in 2006 following a Swedish government crackdown on a popular file-sharing search engine, The Pirate Bay (ibid.). The decriminalization of file sharing was originally the party's main programmatic appeal. The party believes copyright laws are too limiting. File sharing is considered an essentially victimless crime, which is why the state should support it, not forbid it (Uszkai, 2012, p. 49). By placing the Internet at the focus of its political action, the Pirate Party has arguably filled a gap which other parties left unoccupied. It concentrated on technological progress and its consequences for communication and data freedom, which is becoming increasingly more relevant (Hartleb, 2007, p. 363). It has advocated the free flow of information and Internet access as well as fairness in information dissemination. The only permissible encroachment of those rights is in a situation of a clear threat to national security (Uszkai, 2012, p. 49).

Parallel to the Pirate insistence on individual privacy is their call to an open and transparent government (Uszkai, 2012). In criticizing the secrecy of the liberal state, they highlight the tension between the ideal of an open government and the secrecy traditionally associated with policy-making (Cammaerts, 2015, p. 20). It is sometimes claimed that the Pirate Parties do not offer much of a coherent ideology. Indeed, while established parties are usually easily placed on the traditional liberalist-socialist-conservative spectrum, Pirate parties mainly symbolize their interest with the flagship policies of individual privacy and state transparency (Hartleb, 2007, p. 364).

The Pirate Parties display a growing tendency to challenge the established hierarchical rules of decision-making. They try to maximize the organizational inclusiveness among members. The professed belief is that equality among members can be achieved through allocating decision-

making rights equally, and preventing the possibility of sanctioning the membership by the party elite (Bolleyer, Little and von Nostitz, 2015, p. 61).

## Analysis – the Czech Pirate Party

The Czech Pirate Party was established in June 2009, with its organizational structure built to closely mirror that of Pirate Parties in Sweden and Germany discussed below (Piráti, 2018a). Unlike other elected groups, such as the now-governing ANO movement in Czechia, the Czech Pirate Party does not eschew the label of a political party. It has adopted party statutes and has built a hierarchy of power similar to established parties (Piráti, 2015). Below, I examine whether this comes into tension with its professed insistence on IPD, transparency, and individual privacy. The analysis follows the conceptualization of IPD presented elsewhere. I triangulate the party's internal documents with personal interviews<sup>2</sup> and reports from the media, where applicable.

### Decision-making: Program

One way of analyzing IPD within a party is by looking at who has the final say on its manifesto, and whether all party members are included in its approval. The Czech Pirates' Electoral Code stipulates that the National Leadership, composed of the party's Chairman and Deputy Chairmen, is responsible for the preparation of a manifesto, submitting proposals for potential electoral coalitions, and a post-election strategy (Piráti, 2017b). The Leadership is entitled to form working groups which assist in manifesto formation. The manifesto is then passed to the National Committee, a high executive body composed of representatives from each of the regions and other elected members (Piráti, 2015). It is the Committee's task to approve key strategic decisions within the Party, including the content and form of manifestos. Ferjenčík calls

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<sup>2</sup> Full transcripts of the interviews can be found in the Appendices.

the Committee “an intra-party parliament”. Upon approval, the Leadership is then responsible for the conduct of an electoral campaign (Piráti, 2017b). Hence, the party elite appears to have a dominant role. However, this clearly conflicts other stipulations in internal party documents. Namely, the so-called National Forum, composed of all party members, is the highest executive body in the party. Article 3, paragraph 7 of the statutes further states that each party member has the right to participate in the formation of policies within the party. Article 8 also articulates the right of the National Forum “to discuss and approve the basic programmatic and ideational documents of the Party” (Piráti, 2015).

Arguably, the National Forum is the clearest expression of the party’s insistence on IPD. It convenes physically at least once a year, or within three months after each general election (ibid.). Alternatively, members can submit proposals for the Forum via the party’s Internet discussion board, or deliberate in dedicated Facebook groups, as confirmed by Ferjenčík. Owing to the discussion board’s inbuilt voting system, executive decisions in which the members have a say can mostly be taken online. Stunningly, the documents do not give the members an explicit right to participate in the formation of manifestos; the Electoral Code makes no mention of the Forum in respect to manifestos (Piráti, 2017b). However, the interviews reveal that the membership is still, at least somewhat, included in the preparation of manifestos. Chairman Ivan Bartoš says: “We have made a historic decision by relying on IPD. I don’t think the Chairman should be the one making executive decisions within the party.” Accordingly, he mentions that “each A4 sheet of paper [of the manifesto] meant about a thousand hours of sustained work and thirty debates on the discussion board”. He also claims that the National Forum must ultimately approve a manifesto. Hence, contrary to what the internal documents imply, the National Committee is likely not the only body responsible for approval. This is confirmed by Ferjenčík,

who adds that all members must approve an election strategy and election priorities. Moreover, the party's candidate for Prime Minister is chosen in primaries, with all members having a vote (Piráti, 2017b). When asked directly whether manifestos are prepared in a top-down manner, Bartoš asserts: "It [is] basically a crowdsourcing effort, and I think it [is] quite efficient." He adds:

*"There were public shared documents [with drafts of the manifesto], everyone who had a link could comment on the proposals and submit his ideas. There were regular seminars in our offices connected to the given areas, and those were streamed online."*

Michálek claims that in each of the working groups, established by the leadership to prepare the manifesto, rank and file members could participate. Bartoš even implies the process has become more collaborative over the years; before, manifesto formation was the sole responsibility of the National Committee, with very little involvement of the members.

Unfortunately, it is not possible to fully verify the claims, as the shared documents are no longer available and the groups in which many deliberations reportedly took place were private. However, an extensive section exists on the discussion board devoted to the Pirate manifesto (Piráti, 2018b). Hence, there is reason to believe the members were somewhat involved in manifesto formation.

The main formal tool for the members to influence policies within the party is the Member Initiative, defined in the Rules of Procedure (Piráti, 2017a). It gives a group of members, specified as two times the square root of the total number of members, the right to challenge any decision taken by the party. At that moment, the decision loses enforceability until all members vote on it. Hence, the Forum can revoke any decision within the party (Piráti, 2015). Bartoš claims that essentially everything can be challenged using the Member Initiative, including the manifesto: "It



has already happened in the past that we had had a passage in the manifesto that got tweaked by the members through Member Initiatives.” Besides the Member Initiative, the leadership also emphasizes the possibility of informal persuasion, including through calls, instant messages, or personal meetings.

Although the members are likely involved in policy deliberation, I argue the tension between the leadership and the members prevails, and the leadership ultimately has the upper hand. The leadership is responsible for the initial drafting of the manifesto, not the members, and appoints “programmatically guarantors”. Bartoš explains their role as “people competent in the given areas” who lead the working groups and provide the leadership with a succinct version of the manifestos. Although rank and file members may be part of the working groups, Bartoš says that the guarantors steer the discussion and make final decisions. This already acts as a limiting factor on the powers of the membership. Furthermore, the party’s top leadership then verifies the manifesto delivered by the guarantors. Michálek explains: “The teams present us with drafts of their sections of the manifestos, we argue over the points, coordinate, compile a final version.” Although the leadership is always quick to add that members are influential, the leadership’s ultimate responsibility, afforded to it by the statutes, comes to the fore. It is the leadership, not the members, who make the final decision, irrespective of how inclusive the working groups are.

Unlike most established parties, the Member Initiative can hypothetically be used ex-post, to challenge parts of an already-approved manifesto. Interestingly, however, the interviewees – all part of the leadership – react somewhat negatively toward the option. Michálek claims:

*“The way I see it, rank and file members should be primarily active on the local level, work in their regions. That is, I think, their priority for now. It is good when the members submit fewer proposals because that means they do not bother the others that much.”*

Although saying that the manifesto can be changed by the members, even Bartoš admits some Member Initiatives “can be quite hysterical and show no respect for [their] potential impact”. Ferjenčík would prefer informal means of influencing the leadership. He also implies that because elections to the party’s leadership are direct, the leaders have a mandate to make executive decisions.

Upon closer inspection, internal party documents make dominance by the leadership possible. Article 9 of the statutes enables the National Committee, composed of the party leadership, to make decisions in nationwide matters “whenever convening the National Forum would be impossible or impractical” (Piráti, 2015). In a situation where the degree of involvement of the National Forum is not prescribed by the statutes, the leadership can effectively decide on the extent it wants to consult with the members. Still, they must consider the possibility that, when members feel left out, they can vote on the leadership’s dismissal. As Ferjenčík puts it, “People want to keep their parliamentary positions here, even in the future. And if we ignore the members, that’s unlikely to happen.” Still, believing that the membership reigns supreme in the Pirates would probably be naïve. While members might have a substantial role, the leadership has ways to maintain control, similarly to established parties.

## Decision-making: Personnel

The Pirates establish clear rules regarding personnel selections, including the election into positions of power within the party. The Rules of Procedure stipulate that candidates into the

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leadership can be nominated either by a regional branch of the party, or a group of members (Piráti, 2017a). The members can also propose the dismissal of any party member from a position of power, including the leadership. Recently, Jakub Michálek, one of my interviewees, was subjected to such a proposal from the members due to a decision he had made without notifying the members. Some thought this went against the party's key value of transparency, and thus proposed his dismissal. The case attracted significant media attention (e.g. iDnes.cz, 2017). In such cases, the role of the leadership appears limited; there is no way for them to stop a Member Initiative calling for their dismissal. As Bartoš says, he would merely try to use his informal influence within the party to prevent an outcome he does not favor: "I try to show those people that their arguments are not valid and provide them with proof. I want people to vote based on facts. People should not vote on things they have not had time or information for." In the interviews, the leadership admitted they are aware of the possibility of their dismissal by the members, and implied they adjust their actions accordingly.

Moreover, the Member Initiative can also be used to prevent a potential candidacy for the party. Recently, local branches of the Pirates nominated Jan Ruml, a former Minister of the Interior, as their candidate for an upcoming Senate election. Even during our interview, Bartoš conceded: "I did not agree with [the candidacy of Ruml] personally, but that was all I could do. And even if some other regions don't like it, they too have to understand the principle of subsidiarity." He expected that the National Committee would propose a Member Initiative to the National Forum, which would call for the voiding of Ruml's candidacy. Indeed, a week after our interview, that really happened, and the members voted against the candidacy (iDnes.cz, 2018). This nicely demonstrates IPD within the Pirates in two respects. First, the leadership cannot control the candidacies for general elections. It can only nominate candidates for positions in the

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government, or candidates for President (Piráti, 2017a). Second, the leadership generally cannot void a candidacy on its own; it must rely on a vote of the membership. However, excessive optimism is probably not in order. As was the case in manifesto preparation, here the statutes also allow for leadership dominance. Paragraph 17 of the Electoral Code gives the National Committee the option of changing or voiding a proposed list of candidates “in extraordinary and justified cases” (Piráti, 2017b). Yet, as Bartoš explains, this did not apply to the candidacy of Ruml:

*“The National Committee can, hypothetically, void a list of candidates from a region, void a coalition agreement. But that would only happen in extreme cases, if, for example, a Nazi were to become a leader in the region.”*

The definition of “extraordinary and justified cases” remains quite vague. Because its interpretation is likely dependent on the party leadership currently in power, it is conceivable that some would be more sensitive to a given candidacy than others. Indeed, the potential for the misuse of power by the leadership be limited due to the threat of dismissal through a Member Initiative. Nonetheless, IPD within the Pirates is certainly not absolute and the leadership retains some leeway, even in candidate selection.

Importantly, the leadership has limited powers of sanctioning the membership. According to the statutes, an independent Arbitration Committee is set up to handle personal disputes and decide on potential expulsions from the party (Piráti, 2015). The leadership cannot expel members on its own; it can only submit a formal complaint to the Arbitration Committee. This was also confirmed by Michálek in our interview, who called the decision-making process in the Committee “quite rigid”.

## Organizational structure

When analyzing the party's organizational structure more closely, the Internet discussion board deserves special attention. It can be considered a demonstration of how IPD works within the party. By allowing party members or supporters to start a thread on any topic, it greatly simplifies assembly-based IPD. Conversely, by integrating a voting system, it also renders plebiscitary IPD more accessible. Importantly, the discussion board contains a dedicated section for starting Member Initiatives (Piráti, 2018b), which is a vital tool by which members can influence the functioning of the party. Hence, the discussion board itself assumes great importance. However, it appears that the leadership is not satisfied with its functioning. Michálek implies that the image of the board as a tool supporting IPD within the party is utopian:

*“Ultimately, the 80-20 principle applies, and you find out that only twenty percent of the members contribute over eighty percent of the most useful feedback. And this effectively only further strengthens the relationships among the party elite.”*

He complains that the board does not promote any social segmentation, has no clear rules set up for how members should communicate, and as a result produces very little positive feedback. He even mentions cases of members cyber-bullying each other on the board. Ultimately, Michálek suggests that the board actively stifles the party's growth:

*“The way the board is set up today harms us. It does not allow for the party's growth. We got stuck at around four hundred members who keep fighting among each other. And this is often being falsely interpreted as the party's main activity.”*

This is also confirmed by the other interviewees. Ferjenčík claims that the board “has not been the primary means of communication [within the party], and of effecting change for a long time now.

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When a person now wants to achieve something within the party, it is no longer enough to start a thread on the discussion board. It used to be the case for a long time though. That era is, however, long gone." Ferjenčík continues:

*"The board has transformed from a tool for deliberation into rather a tool for voting, publishing important documents and so on. It has turned into a tool for formal processes, but not for meaningful communication."*

For a potential Member Initiative, a thread would still be started in the relevant section, but merely as a formality. Later, support for the proposal would be gathered through different channels, such as Facebook groups. The board would only aggregate votes. A quick perusal of the board suffices to confirm the statements of my interviewees. A lot of recent threads only contain a handful of entries, often with crude announcements of what has been agreed by the leadership, with no attempt at a discussion. Hence, the board has clearly moved away from the ideal tool for IPD. Although deliberation may now be happening elsewhere, there is no longer one main platform to which most members turn. Furthermore, some of the channels for communication may be private (such as Facebook groups), making accessing them – and thus maximizing IPD – more complicated. The leadership acknowledges that the board is insufficient. Michálek claims:

*"I believe we are absolutely lacking an adequate platform to communicate among each other; we are lacking an electronic support system of the functioning of the party, that is a fact.*

*The discussion board is extremely backward, it is underdeveloped. It is like comparing a sophisticated accounting system with a calculator."*

Ferjenčík agrees: "In the future, we are going to try to improve the technological side of the members' communication with the leadership. The discussion board, for instance, is very limited

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in how it allows the members to comment on a proposed law.” Crucially, if the leadership finds it difficult to communicate with the members, partially due to the insufficient discussion board, it becomes more difficult for the members to control the leadership and make sure it does not misuse its power. As I indicated above, stipulations in the statutes hypothetically enable the leadership to be dominant, for instance through voiding candidacies. If no adequate communication platform exists where this could emerge, fewer members will likely be inclined to challenge such actions of the leadership through means such as the Member Initiative. With the increasing need for policy deliberation now that the Pirates are in Parliament, I expect the need for an adequate communication platform to be even higher than before.

Second, the party has likely witnessed a change of its organizational structure following the recent election into the Chamber of Deputies. The creation of a parliamentary group has added a new level into the hierarchy of power of the Pirates. This creates a significant strain. On the one hand, an elected Pirate deputy is still a member of the party. That means he is still nominally subordinated to the National Forum, as the highest executive body of the party according to the statutes (Piráti, 2015). On the other hand, by becoming a Member of Parliament, the deputy has to abide by his oath of office, and, as stipulated in Article 26 of the Czech Constitution, “not be bound by anyone’s instructions.” (*The Constitution of the Czech Republic*, 1992). This theoretically means that Pirate deputies do not have to heed the party’s decisions, including a potential Member Initiative sanctioning the deputy to take a certain action. The strain between the Constitution and partisan responsibilities was further strengthened by the introduction of the Codex of a Pirate Deputy, which was approved by the party before the 2017 election. In it, a prospective Pirate deputy commits “not to vote against a decision taken by the National Forum”, and to vote in concert with the parliamentary group “if it deems a given vote to be fundamental” (Piráti, 2018c).

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The Codex has attracted significant media attention, and the party was accused of unconstitutional tendencies (DVTV, 2017).

Eventually, however, Pirate deputies appear to have significant independence vis-à-vis the membership. Even the Codex itself contains an escape clause stating that “deputies will heed a decision of the National Forum *whenever possible*” (Piráti, 2018c). Similar to other such stipulations in the party statutes, this effectively sidelines the membership and harms IPD within the party. Members of the leadership – and now also deputies – whom I interviewed admit they act independently on the members, despite the Codex. Michálek exclaims: “An elected parliamentarian is independent, responsible for his decisions, and elected to be responsible for them.” When inquired whether the Forum could hypothetically make a deputy take a certain action, as originally envisaged by the statutes and things like the Member Initiative, Michálek claims: “The Forum cannot force us to do anything. When I do not want to do it, I just do not do it.” Ferjenčík agrees: “The leadership takes decisions within the party. And a lot of those decisions are taken without consulting the members. It only depends on the leadership’s political cost-benefit analysis, their accountability, and confidence.” Michálek adds: “I think you can’t really have it any other way. We work here full-time and get paid quite good money for doing our jobs the best we can. And we certainly want to do our jobs. Of course, we can debate with members, and it is important to debate with them. They can still submit their inputs, but I would say it’s mostly important on the local level.”

Ultimately, this is by far the clearest expression of leaders’ and deputies’ independence on the rank and file. Contrary to the statutes and the party’s professed insistence on IPD, some segments of the party are more independent on the membership than others. This discrepancy has gotten more acute with the party’s success in the 2017 election. Bartoš himself concedes that, due



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to the increasing complexity of their work after the election, it is the parliamentary group which must first form an opinion on an issue:

*“Before we reach an opinion, the responsible deputies work on the background materials, do their analyses. And the party at large really gets our stance from the media. We have no space to communicate it to the party membership sooner. Even if he had the space, the members cannot do anything about it.”*

On the other hand, the leadership always quickly adds that consensus within the party, including the rank and file, is key for them, even after the creation of a more-or-less independent parliamentary group. Michálek says:

*“Our party is built around the principle of teamwork more than it is the case in other parties. In my experience, it is often enough to talk to each other, discuss the issues we have. That allows us to later reach a consensus. It works the same way in our parliamentary group now. We do not push our opinions through by force.”*

Ferjenčík attests that the leadership tries to regularly meet with the members, and even claims that it has become easier now that politics is a full-time job, which means more time to work within the party. However, Ferjenčík also admits that decisions taken by the National Committee now carry more weight than they used to. “I would say that the relations with the members still need some tweaking. We would like to devise a system through which the members could get more involved in the process of proposing laws in the Parliament,” he adds. Ultimately, coordination with the members is likely more difficult now, especially considering the greater complexity of tasks and the inefficiency of the discussion board. The party may well insist on consensus and deliberation with the members in principle, but realizing that principle has been complicated.

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Intentionally or not, it is safe to assume that the levels of IPD within the Pirates have decreased, rendering the party more centralized.

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I have aimed to answer this paper's research question in the relevant parts of the analysis. However, to enable the reader to see the changes in the levels of IPD in the Czech Pirate Party more easily, Figure 3 briefly summarizes the findings. The left column outlines the situation before the 2017 election or how IPD levels should be according to official party documents. The right column documents the shift in IPD following the 2017 election, as uncovered in the analysis.

*Figure 3: Changes in IPD in the Czech Pirate Party:*

	<b>Before the 2017 election / official story</b>	<b>After the 2017 election / real story</b>
<b>Decision-making: Program</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- the National Leadership responsible for the preparation, submitting proposals for potential electoral coalitions, and a post-election strategy</li> <li>- Approval by the National Committee</li> <li>- Collaboration among party members, working groups established</li> <li>- Final approval by the National Forum (although not mentioned by the statutes)</li> <li>- The Member Initiative as a tool for challenging decisions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The leadership dominates: appointing programmatic guarantors, making final decisions</li> <li>- Top leadership verifying the final version of manifestos</li> <li>- The size of the working groups is limited</li> <li>- The National Forum can be sidelined by the leadership</li> <li>- The Member Initiative can be used, but the leadership has reservations</li> </ul>
<b>Decision-making: Personnel</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Clear rules for nominations into positions of power and dismissal</li> <li>- The powers of the leadership limited</li> <li>- The Member Initiative can be used to propose a dismissal or prevent a candidacy (potentially even to support a nomination)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The leadership can only void candidacies in extraordinary cases: the definition quite vague and likely dependent on the current leadership's interpretation</li> <li>- The leadership cannot expel party members</li> </ul>
<b>Organizational structure</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The discussion board a tool for IPD (integrating assembly-based and plebiscitary IPD)</li> <li>- The board is the main tool for starting a Member Initiative</li> <li>- The National Forum is the highest executive body in the Party - every member should be subjected to it</li> <li>- Once elected, the leadership claims they have more time to consult with the rank and file</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The leadership critical of the discussion board</li> <li>- Deliberation moved to other channels; the board only a tool for voting</li> <li>- Some deliberation channels now private: IPD limited, the leadership has more autonomy</li> <li>- Pirate Members of Parliament should be independent and cannot be forced to abide by the members' wishes (including a Member Initiative)</li> <li>- The leadership admits the members do not have power over elected representatives</li> <li>- The parliamentary group takes most executive decisions in the party</li> </ul>

## **International comparison: Swedish and German Pirate Parties**

As already mentioned, my analysis draws inspiration from the cases of the Swedish and German Pirate Parties. Indeed, compared to the much less permissive established parties, both the

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Swedish and the German Pirate Parties are highly inclusive in terms of allowing access to their organizations and allowing members to have a say in decision-making (Bolleyer, Little and von Nostitz, 2015, p. 162). For instance, while the Swedish Pirate Party still differentiates between party members and non-members, the line is very thin. It does not even require potential party members to be Swedish citizens; they do not even have to be resident in Sweden, and can be members of more parties simultaneously (ibid.). This represents a significant shift from the more closed structures of long-established parties. Indeed, the relaxed membership requirements are reflected in the total number of party members: around 2009, it has peaked around 50,000 and while it has since decreased, it keeps around 5000 (ibid., 168). The German Pirate Party, by contrast, applies more stringent membership requirements: German citizenship is obligatory, as well as an annual contribution of 48 euros (ibid., p. 165). This is reflected in the party's lower membership base compared to the Swedish party: around 20,000 (Hartleb, 2007, p. 364).

The membership requirements of the Czech Pirate Party are in between the Swedish and German parties. A potential member has to be a citizen of either Czechia or another EU member state resident in Czechia, while members are free to decide how much they contribute in membership fees (Piráti, 2015). Hence, one would logically expect a membership figure in between the Swedish and German Pirates. Yet, the number of members of the Czech Pirates is significantly lower than both counterparts: only 680 members.

The Swedish and German Pirate Parties were very electorally successful. For a long time, the Swedish party was actually the most successful member of the Pirate party family (Erlingsson and Persson, 2011, p. 121). This dominance only ended in 2017, when the Czech counterpart overtook it. Already in June 2006, only a few months after its founding, the Swedish Pirate Party garnered 7.13 percent of the vote in the European Parliament election, gaining one seat (Burkart,

2014, p. 28). This has also brought an increase in the party's membership. Interestingly, most of the party's incoming members were only aged 18-19 years (ibid., p. 18). This is especially interesting given that political party membership has recently declined by more than a third in some European countries (Sloam, 2008, p. 5). While the sudden and unexpected success has undeniably meant an influx of resources and media attention for the Swedish party, it has also put pressures on the organizational structure (Bolleyer, Little and von Nostitz, 2015, p. 162). The German Pirate Party has also generated electoral success. Since 2011, it has entered four state parliaments, and the party consistently polled at over 10 percent on the federal level (Hartleb, 2007, p. 364).

The cases of the Swedish and German Pirate Parties provide further confirmation to my claim that parties have to balance selectivity and inclusiveness in their decision-making processes (Bolleyer, Little and von Nostitz, 2015, p. 160). Theoretically, decisions are the most representative if IPD is maximized. However, maximum inclusiveness could render it problematic to maintain cohesion within the party. Formulating the party's interests could be difficult where individual interests are prioritized and there is no authority regulating the internal debate to reach a consensus. Indeed, in Sweden, the leadership has significant latitude vis-à-vis the members. The national executive can, for instance, expel individual members if they are deemed to harm the party's interests. This, naturally, is a matter of interpretation, much like the vague clauses allowing the Czech party's leadership to void a list of candidates. Similarly, the Swedish party's leadership can withdraw a local party branch's right to speak on behalf of the party, effectively leading to its dissolution (Bolleyer, Little and von Nostitz, 2015, p. 166). Consequently, internal conflict in the Swedish party has been muted, as it has often been ended in its inception by the leadership (ibid.,

p. 171). Still, the Swedish Pirates have noted a decrease of its electoral success recently, having lost their MEP in the 2014 European Parliament election (*ibid.*, p. 173).

On the other hand, the German Pirate Party branches enjoy significantly more autonomy. The leadership is sidelined; expelling members or dissolving branches is the prerogative of independent arbitration tribunals, in which the leadership is not allowed to interfere. The Party essentially operates like a federation of independent Pirate Parties in the respective German federal states (*ibid.*, p. 174). Consequently, infighting has been rampant. What is more, conflict tends to intensify whenever a local branch wins representation in a regional parliament (*ibid.*, p. 171). This has resulted in many defections from the party and has very likely been the cause for its recent poor performance in elections. Despite the originally-optimistic poll results, the German Pirate Party has not managed to enter the Bundestag (Cammaerts, 2015). Currently, the party is looking to restructure its internal organization (Hartleb, 2007, p. 365).

Again, the Czech Pirates stand in between. On the one hand, the members are given significant powers through tools such as the Member Initiative. The leadership's autonomy is limited, although it somewhat exists, as discussed above. Hence, it resembles the German party more. Still, infighting has been limited in the Czech Pirates, although the theory – and examples from Sweden and Germany – would predict otherwise. Similarly, the Czech Pirates are much more electorally successful than the Swedish or German parties ever were. I argue this is likely caused by the relatively low membership figures of the Czech party, the concomitant underdevelopment of local branches and a lower potential for far-reaching conflict, which my interviewees also confirm.

*Figure 4: Summary of the compared cases:*

	Number of members	Inclusiveness	Strength of subnational units	Leadership autonomy	Conflict levels	Electoral success
<b>Czech Pirate Party</b>	680	Medium	Medium	Medium	Medium (especially on the discussion board)	Substantial
<b>Swedish Pirate Party</b>	Below 10,000	Substantial	Low	Substantial	Low	Low
<b>German Pirate Party</b>	Between 10,000-20,000	Low	Substantial	Low	Substantial	Low
<b>Five Star Movement</b>	Around 135,000	Substantial	Low	Substantial	Low (members get expelled for criticism)	Substantial

## Conclusion

This paper has brought a novel look at Michels’ iron law of oligarchy, testing it on the Czech Pirate Party, for whom IPD has been a significant part of its electoral appeal. I have based my analysis on the expectation that if there is one party family able to defeat the iron law, it should be the Pirates. Despite its unexpected electoral success in the 2017 election, relatively little scholarly attention has been afforded to the Czech Pirate Party. My research fills this gap in current research and is the first systematic attempt to analyze the levels of IPD in the party. My interviews with the party’s top leadership, complemented by secondary sources, provide a unique perspective on the party’s functioning, illuminating possible shifts in IPD, which would be difficult to capture using official documents only.

As expected, the results of my analysis are not very optimistic for the potential of the Pirates to defeat the iron law. Granted, tools such as the Member Initiative give members power to influence the internal party functioning more than in the established parties. However, believing the rank and file is supreme in the Pirates would be naïve. The leadership still maintains varying degrees of autonomy. This is mostly notable in how the party’s manifesto is compiled. While the rank and file hypothetically can influence the process through working groups or the Member Initiative, the main responsibility for formulating the basic programmatic priorities and leading

campaigns lies with the leadership. Most members are passive, leaving the door open for leadership dominance. What is more, the leaders even suggest they welcome autonomy on the national level, claiming the members should be primarily active on the local level. Moreover, the channels for IPD within the party are changing. The discussion board, which I originally considered a clear expression of IPD, is inefficient. New means of influencing the leadership rise, some of which purely ad-hoc or even non-public. This further restricts the levels of IPD. Finally, with the recent electoral success, the party's elected representatives sometimes find it impractical to consult the members. Hence, a shift toward centralization is evident,

While this study has contributed by examining an underexplored case, some limitations remain. Mainly, the recent nature of the Czech Pirates' success inhibits robust conclusions about the future development of IPD. I have uncovered strong indications of movement toward centralization, but this must be reviewed over time. Second, I have been unable to examine how the current levels of IPD depend on the present leadership, and how much they are a result of the routinization of internal procedures. Finally, the applicability of the international comparisons is limited, as the original data does not trace the changes in IPD. However, it does indicate that IPD is not absolute, and that the iron law might not hold even in Pirate Parties.

This introduces avenues for future research. First, the Czech Pirates should be studied further, along more electoral cycles and possibly with different leaderships, enabling to analyze how much the current level of IPD depends on a particular leadership. Second, the international comparisons should be studied using my research question. It should be assessed whether the international cases move to greater centralization of power following an electoral success.



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Due to the recent nature of the Pirate party family, my results are not conclusive. However, I have uncovered strong indications that the iron law of oligarchy holds, even a century after its formulation.

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## Appendix A – International comparison: Beppe Grillo’s Five Star Movement in Italy

To further solidify the relevance of my research, it is worth noting that the dilemma between inclusiveness and leader authority is not only limited to the Pirate parties. A similar tendency can be traced in Italy’s Five Star Movement (M5S), established by former comedian Beppe Grillo. It was the most popular contestant in the 2013 election, having gained 25.6% of the vote (Tronconi, 2015b). Officially, the M5S strongly rejects the label of a political party and all organizational structures typically associated with it (ibid., p. 1). It is clearly anti-elitist, extolling the people as the only source of political legitimacy (Bordignon and Ceccarini, 2013). In keeping with its professed disdain for “traditional politics”, the Movement should only serve as a “platform and vehicle for debate and consultation” (Vignati, 2015, p. 30). The tasks of the leadership should be limited to ratifying the lists of candidates wishing to run for the M5S and checking that they respect its basic principles (ibid., p. 34). At the heart of the M5S is a utopian idea, somewhat reminiscent of Communism, that political parties are eventually destined to disappear and that citizens are to govern themselves, in a community (ibid., p. 29). The Internet should help “break the chains” of old representative politics and allow human destiny to be decided in real-time by allowing everyone to take an active part in the Movement’s decision-making (Tronconi, 2015b, p. 4). The professed inclusiveness is also reflected on the Movement’s membership base, which stood at around 135,000 in 2016, much more than any of the Pirate Parties (Jones, 2016)

However, the image of the M5S as an organization lacking a hierarchy of power and realizing a new model of direct democracy crumbles upon closer inspection (Tronconi, 2015a, p. 219). Despite the claims that the leadership is not involved in the internal functioning of the Movement, the central office can sanction local exponents of the organization. Crucially, Grillo himself owns the brand of the M5S (Vignati, 2015, p. 30). This effectively allows him to exercise total top-down control over its strategic decisions (Bordignon and Ceccarini, 2013, p. 428), even to the point of revoking an elected official’s mandate. Some people have been expelled from the Movement following their criticism of Grillo (Mosca, Vaccari and Valeriani, 2015, p. 131). Rather than being a tool for constant consultation and deliberation of the members, the Internet is being used to legitimize decisions already made by the leadership (ibid., p. 132). As there are no rules governing the internal life of the Movement, the decision on what to consult with the members, and how, must be taken unilaterally by Grillo. Because he is also the only owner of the Movement’s online infrastructure, no checks on the transparency and security of online voting have been possible (Tronconi, 2015a, p. 219). Ultimately, it appears that Grillo solves the dilemma between inclusiveness and leader dominance by creating a façade of a bottom-up organization. Although member independence is tolerated to a limited extent, Grillo steps in whenever local branches of the M5S might become too autonomous (Vignati, 2015, p. 35). Hence, IPD is very likely *not* the core value of the M5S in practice. While the M5S is theoretically similar to the Pirates in its insistence on the Internet for communication, the leadership dominates.

## Appendix B – Interview with Ivan Bartoš

### **You have been a long-time chairman of the Czech Pirate Party. How would you respond to those who criticize the party for not being ideologically stable?**

In that respect, the latest party congress that took place in Brno this January is very interesting. With the increasing number of members and the upcoming regional elections, some fears of a possible “hijack” of the party surfaced. Fears that people would come who would abuse the system of absolute intra-party direct democracy, member initiatives and so on. But what is interesting: not a single proposed change to the party statutes passed at the congress. I myself did not vote for any change. Among those proposals, some called for limiting the establishment of new regional branches of the party and making the party leadership more powerful vis-à-vis the regions. What happens under the current system is that any new regional branch has to be approved by the regional leadership of the party.

### **And you as the nationwide leadership don't have any role?**

No, we don't influence the process of establishing new branches in any way. But what is most important is that it is the sole responsibility of the regional party leadership to know the people in their regions, the people who are establishing new branches. And to order them not to establish any new regional branches is utter nonsense. Not only does it show your lack of confidence in the regional party leadership, but your interference with their affairs also takes away that responsibility they should have for their regions from them. We want them to remain responsible, to make sure they don't accept any stale, incompetent former Social Democrats, for instance. There were about two or three proposals for a change in the functioning of the party organization, and it was met with massive resistance. And I think that is very important. That whenever problems come up in the party, they should be solved differently than by changing the party constitution. It's the same in Parliament now. We are proposing a number of laws, and the government started calling the proposals “Lex Babiš”. But that law is important no matter who is in the government at the moment. We have noticed a tendency with the other parties to incorporate passages into proposed laws that only respond to the current political situation; they don't solve a wider problem. For instance, now that we have had a government without the confidence of the Parliament for a long time, some amendments appeared that wanted to incorporate the phrase “and it cannot be done by a government without the parliament's confidence”. Back to your question. In the Pirates, we really insist on a bottom-up approach. The regional branches are responsible, for instance, for putting together their lists of candidates. And the National Committee can only step in when there is a massive screw-up. You cannot simply step in only because you don't like the result of their primaries or when they elect a problematic leader, with a bad media image, for example. You have to respect things as they are. And then, it is the task of the Media Department to explain those things. The chairman of the Media Department must come up with a solution to the conundrum, for example when the opposition attacks a certain leader elected on your regional list of candidates. And that has to be done without interfering with the rights of the membership. Now that we are expanding, and the regional organizations grow, to over a thousand or two thousand members, we in the leadership really have to remind ourselves that the subsidiarity principle is an inalienable principle, something we cannot abandon, under any circumstances. With the expansion, we are going to have autonomous branches of the party, say in the Karlovy Vary region, and you as the party chairman simply cannot aspire to manage the party hierarchically, to have everything under control. Yes, I still get most of the information, but that doesn't mean I should have executive power in the regions. You can come for a visit, give advice, but that is it. And that are certainly problems we are going to have to solve. Especially

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with the Internet, there is no such thing as a local coalition government, as a local affair. Everything is public, worldwide. And this is often reflected in the media. To give you an example. Recently, there was a guy who went to a meeting with Kajínek. And, unfortunately, this guy had a legally-owned gun on him. And some media outlets picked up it and claimed he was a regional leader for the Pirates.

**And was he?**

No, that is the thing. But it took them seconds to tag me on Facebook. And in fifteen minutes, I knew what happened. The guy ran for us in a previous campaign in one of the regions, he is not a member of the party.

**Even if he were a member, what would be the problem?**

Well, if he had been a member, I would have probably stepped in. You cannot go to the public with a gun, drink, and act like a fool. But I used this as an example how even small things like this can easily impact the party, especially in competition with the other parties now. And the whole party has to know for certain what its main principles are. Another example. In a recent primary in the Plzeň region, the regional branch elected Ruml, a former minister, as their candidate for the Senate. I did not agree with it personally, but that was all I could do. And even if some other regions don't like it, they too have to understand the principle of subsidiarity. Of course, the National Committee discusses this issue, it has the right to.

**So do you have any rights as to the regional selection of candidates?**

The National Committee can, hypothetically, void a list of candidates from a region, void a coalition agreement. But that would only happen in extreme cases, if, for example, a Nazi were to become a leader in the region. In this particular case, however, I think the National Committee will not have grounds to act. What I think is going to happen is that the National Committee will turn to the National Forum, which is composed of all party members. And in two recent polls, the members already expressed they were against Ruml running for us. So I think there is going to be a Member Initiative, and in the end all the members are going to vote against his candidacy. I don't want to predict what will happen, I just want to be prepared for the possibility. And even though I am against his candidacy, I still don't think it would be an extreme problem if he did run. On this issue, I just wanted to show you how democracy can work within the party. Sometimes, it generates less work, sometimes more. I, as the chairman, cannot tell them "I don't want to deal with this issue, don't do it like this, do it like that instead."

**That reminds me. At the January party congress, you mentioned you would like to turn the party into a structure for several thousand members. I presume the increasing number of members will exert increasing pressure on you, or the leadership in general. How to deal with that?**

Of course, there are groups with different opinions in the party. And those different groups are also reflected in our parliamentary group. We have our main programmatic priorities and we know that some other issues are not worth a potential split within the party. Hence, about every fifth vote in the Parliament is a free vote, everyone votes independently according to his or her beliefs. A good example is the church restitutions law. Everyone can have different motivations that inform his vote, and this vote is not key for the party. Some of the reasons our deputies have for their votes may be ethical, some may be driven by their atheist beliefs. For issues that are not key, we only insist on the best possible information given to our members, so that they can make the best possible decision. What I think is key in the whole organization are the means of communication. The problem in the Chamber now is that it only takes minutes before we have to respond,

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at least to the media. With the recent bombing of Syria, for example. It was on a Saturday. I woke up at seven in the morning and I immediately had to get Peksa from the Foreign Affairs Department, Lipavský, because at eight, I already had to give my qualified opinion. By that time, I had already read about it, watched the Syrian media. It was really quick. To give another example. When the Chamber is in session, the afternoon bloc begins at two in the afternoon. Our parliamentary group meets at nine in the morning. The deputies responsible for the items on the agenda give their recommendations for the Pirate votes. We then agree whether we vote unanimously or whether we do a free vote. At one in the afternoon, I go and announce our stance to the media. From then on, our stance is publicly known. Before that, it is impossible to present the opinions of our parliamentary group, because I myself don't know it in advance. Before we reach an opinion, the responsible deputies work on the background materials, do their analyses. And the party at large really gets our stance from the media. We have no space to communicate it to the party membership sooner. Even if he had the space, the members cannot do anything about it.

**That is exactly what I am interested in. Is there any communication going on between the elected deputies and the members?**

Sure. There is a newsletter, we inform them about things we know in advance. Recently, we have discussed the restitutions with them, our stance toward NATO. I think about four issues a month are confirmed by a vote among all the members. Besides, because our manifesto has been built around core issues, there are many things on which you don't have to ask the members anymore because the stance is already clear. There has been a communication gap, but not to the members, but rather to the media. For example, we were not at all prepared for the negative campaign started against us regarding a recent anti money laundering law.

**Are manifestos prepared by the leadership? How can members contribute to the final version of the manifesto?**

It was basically a crowdsourcing effort, and I think it was quite efficient. Although it may have seemed as if we worked on it for a long time, in fact we started putting it together in November 2016. So it took us about a year. And it was being published gradually because its parts were being completed over time and approved over time.

**Was the manifesto approved by all party members?**

Yes. First by the National Committee and then by the National Forum, composed of all party members. And the ratification process of the manifesto took a longer time because each A4 sheet of paper with the programmatic priorities for each of the ministries meant over let's say a thousand hours of sustained work, thirty debates on the discussion board. And then, Jakub Michálek came and told us that it was inefficient to publish a very long manifesto, like the Green Party does. I mean, their manifesto is great, but no one is ever going to read it. So we knew we needed to simplify. If we were asked by anyone on the street what the Pirate priorities in healthcare were, we would be able to name two things. We started to cut down. And of course, a lot of supporting materials were still available; you could look up articles explaining certain areas. I have to admit that sometimes, our simplifications went too far and made our priorities look different to the way they were originally intended. For instance, when we wanted to emphasize the importance of municipal housing, the final version of the manifesto bluntly said "we prefer social housing rather than housing subsidies". The problem was that housing subsidies can be obtained even by families where both



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adults have well-paying jobs, not only by the poor. So our original intentions got a little blurred due to our simplifications. We never wanted to propose abolishing housing subsidies, but we made it look that way.

**Are the final simplifications in a manifesto done by the leadership?**

The programmatic areas had their guarantors. This does not mean that guarantors are automatically our candidates for ministers. Rather, it's just people competent in the given areas. And the guarantors were supposed to provide us with the final one page of the manifesto in their area.

**Were the guarantors somehow connected to the rank and file?**

The guarantors were responsible for delivering a shortened version of the manifesto. And the whole process largely worked in the Google environment. There were public shared documents. Coincidentally, many passages in Babiš's book come from there, some even word-for-word. Each of the guarantors, or their teams, then invited other people to edit the documents. For instance, I worked on parts connected to culture and defense. But then, everyone who had a link could comment on the proposals and submit his ideas. There were regular seminars in our offices connected to the given areas, and those were streamed online, so that as many of our members could see them as possible. Some of the members' proposals were accepted, some rejected, as is usually the case when collecting ideas. Such a process would take let's say five months, and then we ended up with a final document. Before, the National Committee was solely responsible for the formation of a manifesto. I remember that eight years ago, we met in Varnsdorf for three days and worked on the manifesto there. But now, we really wanted to make it more collaborative.

**So each member would somehow get a link and get invited into the process of manifesto formation?**

Basically, it could have been anyone, yes. But in each of the working groups, we would usually have a person we call a "closer". You have to be prepared to face people who are always opting for alternative solutions and not willing to settle on a consensus. So the closers would be responsible for determining which opinion within the group was predominant. You can't have a manifesto that say "this is going be like this, but it could also be like that for those who don't agree". You have to reach a final decision. The guarantors were responsible for ensuring that a consolidated, relatively consensual manifesto would be delivered by a specified date. And of course, consultations with the National Committee were ongoing.

**Is it safe to say that the guarantors have some degree of authority over the members, to for example say "OK, the debate is over now, we have to take this decision"?**

Yes. There is a democratic minimum inside the party, and it has several levels. The first level is purely procedural and technical. For example, when there is a meeting on a topic, the meeting's agenda has to be approved. Everyone has to get the information through specified channels. For example in Prague, we have a standard that every time there is a vote, each member gets an SMS reminding him. You have to fulfill those basic procedural requirements, and when you don't, someone can later challenge the result of the vote only based on your failure to comply with the democratic minimum. Another level of the democratic minimum pertains to competence. That is the reason we don't vote for proposals that appear at the plenary in the Chamber. Typically, a party, let's say the ODS, comes in the morning and announces they will propose a law we have never seen before. We ask them "How long have you had this ready for?" "A month," they say. "Well, we have only had it for ten minutes". So that is another thing you cannot do in the

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party; vote on something without preparation. But of course, you can't measure this level of the democratic minimum.

### **So when you don't have time to discuss a proposal with your members...**

No. You suppose that your deputies and members make informed decisions. And I sometimes challenge proposals that lack a necessary minimum of information. For example, when there is a blatantly biased Member Initiative, let's say someone wants to get Jakub Michálek dismissed from the leadership because he doesn't like him. I try to show those people that their arguments are not valid and provide them with proof. I want people to vote based on facts. This is more an ethical level of the democratic minimum. People should not vote on things they have not had time or information for.

### **How does that work in practice?**

OK. Let's say we have a hypothetical situation, on which you don't have a stance straight away. Let's say there is a new international organization, the W8, an alternative to the Visegrad Group, but only composed of liberal EU members. But, there is one troublemaker state as well. And the Czech government is just about to sign the accession agreement into this organization. What do I know about this organization? What does the National Committee know? We ask Mikuláš Peksa, former chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee, now the responsible deputy in the Chamber, to read up on it. The Foreign Affairs Committee does research and advises us on whether the Pirates should support the initiative. This should later be approved by the National Committee, as every stance that has previously not been approved by the party.

### **Would you consult the members in preparing such a decision?**

The Foreign Affairs Committee would have authority to prepare our stance, which is then discussed by the National Committee. If there is not a definitive consensus in the National Committee, there can always be a Member Initiative started in the National Forum. All in all, this whole thing could be done in three weeks, including any possible amendments. To be more specific, the usual timeline for the National Committee would be around a week, for the National Forum about two to three weeks. Within those three weeks, the other parties would have already given their opinions twenty times. The best real-life example of the process would be the 2015 complex stance of the Pirate Party on the migration crisis. It is a very thorough four-page document that deals with all the details, including the procedures for returning migrants to their countries of origin, common defense. The other parties spent a year coming up with nonsense going to the extremes: either an absolute no to migration, or an absolute welcome to everyone coming in. For us, the preparation of this four-page document, processing in the Foreign Affairs Committee and the National Committee, and a poll among all the members, the whole thing took us three weeks from scratch to publishing. So the process is ultimately much more valid and the results much more rigid.

### **So the rank and file members can still contribute their input into the party's policies?**

It happens all the time. And we should not forget about the Member Initiative that any party member can run. An initiative can be submitted to the National Forum, anything that can be voted on, basically. The members can task the other party bodies, either the National Committee or the national leadership, with things. The initiative can be started in the relevant section on the discussion board and then the member starts gathering support, in any way he can. If the required support is gathered, the initiative is passed to the National Forum which then has to decide on the initiative within two weeks. It can be anything really:

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revoking a previous decision, changing a passage in the manifesto. And the leadership has no say in the process of member initiatives.

**But is it safe to say that the leadership still prepares at least the necessary basics of a given law proposal, for instance?**

Yes, that would be prepared by the relevant guarantor. It has already happened in the past that although we had had a passage in the manifesto that was approved, it then got tweaked by the members through Member Initiatives. Some initiatives may be quite hysterical and show no respect to the initiative's potential impact, though. As an example, some members called for a complete abolishment of the EET. But that would, of course, have an enormous negative impact on the economy and would probably lead to the country being sued by those affected by it. Huge investments would probably be lost. Still, there was an initiative calling for this to happen. In the end, it did not pass.

**And if it had passed?**

Then we would have approved it as usual. Look, there are people coming to be basically on a daily basis and have advice pertaining to the Pirate manifesto. It's definitely not a set-in-stone document. How the manifesto looks today depends on the time constraints valid at the time of its formation, the level of information you had when you were putting it together. Of course, a lot has changed since our election in this respect. Today, I just tell the relevant minister that I want a prediction regarding the future availability of housing in Czechia and she gives the data to me because I am chairman of the relevant parliamentary committee. But we can go into more detail. When someone comes to me and criticizes our manifesto, I'm not just going to say "Look, that's the way it's written there, bye". Rather, I tell that person "OK, this issue is being dealt with by those two Pirate deputies, this one guarantor, and this working group. Here is the contact information. Have a meeting and talk about it". Of course, sometimes the critique is very constructive and leads to us improving the manifesto.

**On the other hand, your potential efforts to change the manifesto are now limited because you have been elected based on that manifesto, right?**

Sure, but as I'm saying, we have not come up with the thing overnight. So I don't expect any drastic changes. I am not expecting a 180-degree change of direction. Rather, a few degrees' change, to make our direction a bit more accurate.

**What do you perceive to be the party's safeguards preventing it from dramatically changing its direction overnight?**

The intelligence of the members of our party. There is no other party in the Czech Republic that would be so firmly ideologically grounded. There is not. Plus, we are not hysterical. Where there is consensus within the party, it is very firm. Where we had to reach a compromise, because we simply are a democratic party, our opinions are moderate. And I would like our critics to show me where exactly we have changed our opinion, of the important stuff, an unexpected change of our direction. There has been nothing like that. I have published the later I wrote to the Pirate Party's founder nine years ago, and today, I am still doing the very same things I mentioned in that letter. And I have never done anything different.

**What about any safeguards in the statutes, for example?**

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The statutes clearly state we are a liberal, democratic party, that insists on the protection of individual freedoms and human rights. We want to be active. God, ideally, we should attend every single protest. We are active against racism, sexism, discrimination.

**The others mentioned that the intra-party consensus also acts as an important corrective mechanism. I was originally afraid that the Member Initiative may be used excessively, paralyzing the party's operation.**

No. We have learned very quickly that, if you are to succeed, winning by a small margin is in fact no victory at all. If you want to have a future, you always have to be respectful. Even after a controversial decision that may appear to be an either-or decision, you still have to keep in mind that you have to survive as an organization, even after that difficult decision is taken. You have to keep the dialogue going until even a small minority is at least somewhat satisfied with the decision. You can't get rid of them. We have made a historic decision by relying on intra-party democracy, and it has been very convenient for me as the chairman. I don't think the chairman should be the one to make the executive decisions in the party. I have a lot of responsibilities rather than privileges and prerogatives. Of course, it has happened that a certain decision was too much for some members, and they decided to leave because of it. It would be the same for me, in some cases. If I couldn't accept a certain decision and if it were very important for me. Sure, we have some people in the party who would like to leave NATO. In the recent presidential election, a party poll showed most members supported Marek Hilšer in the first round of the vote. In the runoff round, the need to vote anti-Zeman was of course very strong. But still, there were 15 people who would vote for Zeman. Some media got in touch with me and asked why we don't expel those members. And I just said "Look, we are a democratic party. And I may not like Zeman, or any other President, but we are a parliamentary democracy, not presidential. And the Pirate Party does not die if some members vote for Zeman or someone else. I think those attacks come from a lack of understanding of our party. Some people may be afraid of democracy.

**So whenever you reach a consensus, it comes from or is supported by the members, right? It is not that Bartoš decides he wants to have it a certain way and the party follows?**

Absolutely not. And often, reaching a consensus is more important for us than the exact direction in which the decision goes in. It may sound vague, but it is in fact very strict. Let me put it simply. We have an approved post-election strategy. I can't decide tomorrow that I suddenly want to go negotiate a coalition with Babiš. I just can't.

**What if the members, theoretically, wanted you to enter a government?**

We have a recurring poll regarding our post-election strategy, and around 95% of the members keep voting against our involvement. And of course, this can change over time, it can be dynamic. The problem is the government situation has not changed in five months, although it may look like it. But now, most people are very much against it. And I have to say that even if the decision changed, I wouldn't go there.

**Where?**

Negotiate with Babiš. I couldn't bare it.

**What would happen then?**

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I don't know, I probably couldn't be party chairman. Or I would say I don't agree with it and that I'm not going, that I couldn't be member of the negotiation team.

**What if the members suddenly wanted you to go?**

You are a political scientist, you know that I don't give a damn about hypothetical situations. People keep underestimating the intelligence of Pirate Party members. Over the years, there have been hundreds of votes in the National Forum. Show me some extreme decisions. There have been none.

**I understand that you wouldn't do something you would be opposed to in principle. I was more interested in the general attitude of the leadership. Would someone from the leadership carry out a wish of the members, even if you may be personally opposed to it?**

I would certainly use my natural authority as a leader. When I state my opinion in a debate, which I believe I can argue for quite well, of course the weight of my opinion in a debate is higher in practice, although not officially. But when it's only a matter of personal preference, I don't use the power of my personality. When a regional branch decides against my wishes, I don't go there and tell them what they should do. Rather, I talk to them later, when we meet. Of course, if the party were to take a wrong direction, I would use my power. But it's more the power of one's personality, not my power as a chairman. Personality matters. When Jakub Michálek writes his opinion on the discussion board, he can attract more opposition, simply because he is so practice and result-oriented. He doesn't show emotions. He doesn't care so much about the social impact of his actions.

**Would you say that the leadership sometimes does things that the rank and file members don't like?**

No. And even if, every decision can be revoked through a Member Initiative. Sometimes, a quick decision by the leadership may be necessary, for example in a campaign or regarding an acquisition. We have done the decision. And we might have, unintentionally, overstepped the boundaries specified by the members and were later corrected through a Member Initiative. Sometimes, the members react too rashly I would say. It could have been enough to just call us instead. Historically, we have had issues. Such as the proposal to the court which Jakub later pulled, and it led to a vote on his dismissal. But he was correct to do so, as the proposal was wrong. But the move to pull the proposal was not under our control. Someone did it under my name, which is usual practice, but we didn't know and only found out from the media.

## Appendix C – Interview with Jakub Michálek

**Good morning. Before we start, I would like to thank you wholeheartedly for taking the time to talk to me today. My first question will be a bit more on the general side. I have been following the party from its establishment and I am aware of its most important manifesto points. However, I was wondering about the key values on which the party's internal organization is built around. What would those be, in your opinion? Are there any values without which it would be inconceivable for you to be a member of the party?**

Well, I think the principle of transparency is really the key value. It is really vital that when a new member joins the party, we do not look down our noses at him or her, which can sometimes be the case in the established parties, like the Social Democrats. There, the new member have to first get into the higher echelons of the internal party organization, become party apparatchiks. And the longer he is an apparatchik, the more power he wields within the party. This is not the case in the Pirates. What it means is that when new, competent people join, they can very rapidly get to the top. A good example is Štěpán Štrébl who joined in the autumn of last year...

**Was that after the election or before?**

I'm sorry, I meant 2016, not last year. And it took him only a few months to get really integrated into the internal functioning of the party. He was so involved that very shortly after joining, he took an active part in compiling the party's manifesto for the 2017 election. He also gave active recommendations as to how to take the manifesto forward in terms of its presentation to the public. For instance, our aim was to make sure that the topics we consider important would be conveyed more in economic terms rather than by simply emphasizing the need for transparency we advocate. We wanted the manifesto to be appealing for the majority of the electorate. And in only a few months, Štěpán succeeded in on open tender for the 2017 election manager, which meant he effectively became the head of the whole campaign. Within the party, I have always been a strong advocate of the principle that the best of us should always be given the opportunity to get their hands on some real work. People who are able to contribute should not be prevented from really playing their part only because some would consider them too junior. That is also why we do open tenders, even here in the Chamber of Deputies. We have been trying to set a standard for nominating competent people to important positions, so that things that happen in the other parties would not happen to us. What often happens is that the parties get too isolated and yield to nepotism. Effectively, what that means is that the productivity of the party goes down, that the party does not deliver real results, and only succumbs to infighting.

**I have just noticed you have called a new open tender for a position on the board of a state-owned company. I don't remember what company it was exactly.**

We call many of those. Recently, we have opened positions in the Public Health Insurer (VZP), the State Fund of Transport Infrastructure...

**Yes, I think that was it.**

And there are many others.

**You have been a member of the party basically since its founding in 2009, is that correct?**

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Yes, I came a few months after the party was established.

**Right. And I was wondering what the biggest change has been, in your opinion, in terms of the party's functioning and internal organization since the founding days. Of course, we are sitting in the Chamber of Deputies now, so that would probably be a big change, but what do you think has changed in terms of the party's main values, principles, its organization?**

It has definitely moved forward a great deal. At the beginning, we were just a bunch of amateurs. No one really knew how to do politics properly, there was no professional staff. We just came together, as a group of enthusiasts, who knew they wanted to do the job right, but we did it only in our free time, and we did not know what to do and how. This was naturally also reflected in how the party looked from the outside – it was really an awkward organization.

**Would you say it has been an evolution, or was there rather a key moment that changed everything?**

For me, the key moment has been when we very nearly got into the European Parliament in the 2014 election. In the end, we did not manage to cross the five percent threshold, very nearly, but it was a clear signal that we were capable of succeeding and that we could do it in the future. We only got 4.7 percent, which made everyone very sad, but I was certain that we would succeed next time. And indeed, only a few months later, we succeeded in the Capital City Council elections, where I later headed the party's Council group.

**You only recently gave that position up, correct?**

Yes. It is one of our key policies not to cumulate elected positions, which I really appreciate. So the Prague City Council election was key. Later, our representatives were also elected in Brno, the second largest city. Gradually, a party elite came into existence. I don't like to call it an elite, but in effect every organization gets stratified over time. Some people take leading roles, become more active, and they move the party forward. They have a chance to learn new things, learn how to do politics, become acquainted with real problems in cities around the country. This later allows them to actively solve those problems when they finally get into the Parliament. Ultimately, succeeding in local elections was very important. As for the general election of 2017, the key thing that really helped us succeed was, I think, that there was no infighting within the party when we were putting together the campaign. In a lot of the previous campaigns, the biggest problem was that people started to fight.

**Do you refer to your campaigns?**

Sure, our campaigns. In the Prague City Council campaign, there also was no fighting. But in previous nationwide campaigns, there had been a very negative influence of the party's internet discussion board.

**Do you believe the discussion board has had a negative impact?**

Oh, definitely! Certainly. Naturally, there are differing viewpoints within the party, but I strongly believe it is a negative influence. In the party's annual report two years ago, I think, we persuasively showed that the way the discussion board is set up today, harms us. It does not allow for the party's growth. We got stuck at around four hundred members who keep fighting among each other. And this is often being falsely interpreted as the party's main activity. My girlfriend is just writing her undergraduate thesis on the topic, mainly focusing on the grassroots principle within the Icelandic Pirate Party. And she has found that many sociologists believe that the internet gives a false idea of participation. Sure, in a lot of cases, getting people

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involved over the Internet may be useful. For instance, we have got some very useful feedback via email. Ultimately, however, the 80-20 principle applies, and you find out that only twenty percent of the members contribute over eighty percent of the most useful feedback. And this effectively only further strengthens the relationships among the party elite. As I have already mentioned, there always is an “elite” within an organization. However, what is very important is that the elite does not go crazy, that it does not do whatever it wants, as it sadly often happens in this country. Big corporations often avoid paying taxes – the bigger they get, the less taxes they pay because the social security contribution is capped. And there are many other examples like this one.

**So if I understand you correctly, would you advocate more powers for the party elite and less space for the internet discussion board?**

I would not limit anything. I am just saying that about three four years ago, many people left the internet discussion board only because a group of people formed there that actively bullied other members. For instance, we once had a very competent young lady who headed the Media Department within the party. She was a huge driving force in ensuring that in 2012, Libor Michálek would later become our first-ever elected Senator, coincidentally the first-ever elected representative of the Pirate movement worldwide, even before the Icelandic Pirates. And people slandered this woman on the discussion board, saying that she had a massive ass and advising her to go screw herself. So when communication happens only on the level of the internet discussion board where there is no natural social segmentation and there is only very little positive feedback, with practically no internal rules set up that would motivate people to act positively, be constructive, it naturally harms the party’s results in the end.

**If I understand the party statutes correctly, even the people who appear on the Internet discussion board and start quarrels, those internet trolls are still members of the party's National Forum, right?**

Yes, those are full-fledged members of the party. When I think of it. Let me give you another example of an extreme case of what happened on the internet discussion board. It was a case of a member who vulgarly and quite in public attacked one of our assistants on the board. To make matters worse, the woman was even pregnant at that time. Because there was further reason to believe that this man was continuing in harming the party, he was later expelled. Or, to be more precise, the Arbitration Committee expelled him. We have a system of checks and balances with the party, which means that it is much more difficult to blatantly misuse power. To give an example, it is impossible for the party presidium to expel members of its own accord, as it often happens in other parties. For that we have an independent Arbitration Committee and it is quite a rigid process.

**Right. Every member of the party is also a member of the National Forum so that means he or she can effectively decide on the party's policies, correct?**

Correct.

**I was wondering: in a situation where there are people who intentionally disrupt the process as you mentioned on the example of the Internet discussion board. Couldn't that be problematic in terms of how the party functions?**



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Yes, I would say it's a typical problem of the pirate parties worldwide because they have been built, to an extent, around the idea of rebelling against the system. Some people within the party see themselves as being rebels. They even thrive on attacking others.

**According to the statutes, a group of members within the National Forum can initiate an inspection of any decision taken within the party. I was wondering about the extent to which this prerogative could apply. For instance, what is the relationship of the National Forum to you as elected representatives? To take it to the extreme, what if a group of members within the Forum decided that you should resign your mandate in Parliament?**

No, that would not happen. We have compiled the Codex of a Pirate Deputy, which specifies in extensive detail what the relationship between the Forum and us as deputies is. It specifies that the deputies should not vote in opposition to a decision taken within the Forum. However, the Forum cannot force us to do anything. When I do not want to do it, I just do not do it. To a large extent, the Codex is only morally binding, although there are passages that could even be legally enforceable.

**I have noticed in the media that the party was quite heavily scrutinized because of the Codex. It was alleged that the Codex goes against the Constitution. Some thought that the passage requiring a deputy to vote in line with the party's wishes goes against the oath each deputy takes, according to which he or she will only vote "only according to his or her best knowledge and conscience".**

Yes, correct. I think this question is very sensitive, but this particular passage refers more to a deputy's moral bond to the party.

**So this particular passage is not legally enforceable?**

We have a very solid legal opinion on it. But it is naturally not possible for the Forum to order a deputy how to vote, that's naturally not possible. So this prerogative of the Forum is in effect somewhat limited; it is only a corrective mechanism, similar to what they call a suspensive veto via a referendum in the US. There, when the Parliament passes a law the public does not agree with, they have a limited time slot within which they can gather a set number of signatures and challenge the law through a referendum. In the party, we call this mechanism an Extraordinary Inspection, which is a mechanism I personally devised. Funnily enough, it is sometimes being applied against me as well, but that's a different story. There is a 14-day period in which party members can gather support for their claim. And of course, because the party develops over time. Conflicts gradually develop, and as they get settled, people gradually learn how to use those corrective mechanisms. With time, they become more careful as to when to use them. Ultimately, the mechanism is not overused by any means; quite the contrary. For that to happen, for the party to be paralyzed through the Extraordinary Inspection, the group willing to challenge a party's policy would have to be quite large.

**To quote from the Codex, a Pirate representative commits himself to "heed a decision taken by the National Forum, whenever possible". How do you perceive yourself vis-à-vis the party membership? Do you perceive yourself as autonomous, or do you perceive a strong commitment toward the membership?**

I perceive it in line with the Czech constitutional order. That means that an elected parliamentarian is independent, responsible for his decisions, and elected to be responsible for them. On the other hand, our

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party is built around the principle of teamwork more than it is the case in other parties. Our members have put enormous effort into building up the party, for example in putting together the campaigns. In my experience, it is often enough to talk to each other, discuss the issues we have. That allows us to later reach a consensus. It works the same way in our parliamentary group now. We do not push our opinions through by force. Rather, we discuss them and reach some kind of a consensus. Even if the consensus is not unanimous, we are always able to at least agree on the basics. For instance, when we vote on a largely value-based issue, such as the complete ban of smoking in restaurants, some deputies might be strongly opposed to any exceptions in the law, while others may be strong advocates of some exceptions. In that case, we simply agree to disagree and the Pirate deputies have a free vote; they vote in line with their personal beliefs.

**How has communication within the party changed after its election to the Chamber? Hasn't it become more difficult with the increasing amount of issues you are expected to have a stance on?**

We are definitely undergoing a transformation. A few years ago, we used to have a system of guarantors – people responsible for the formation of the party's stance on a certain issue. Recently, we have changed the system to correspond more to the ministerial departments in Czechia. Each of the ministries had one guarantor assigned to it. I have to admit there are still some residues of the old system based on issues because the people did not want to lose their positions. Still, we are now trying to create teams responsible for the respective departments that is then in charge of preparing the party's stances corresponding to the department's issues. This means that any person coming to us knows whom to contact when he or she wants to get information about where we stand on an issue.

**So the guarantor is tasked with following the opinions within the party's membership, and then form issue stances in coordination with the leadership?**

Well, each of the teams should ideally consist of people who are able and willing to constructively contribute to the formation of the given policies. Within the team, there is always an elected deputy responsible for the given issue, and this deputy should always be consulted when forming an issue stance. Naturally, were the team trying to force through a stance with which the deputy does not agree, this would be doomed to fail from the outset.

**And this responsible deputy you mention is who exactly?**

It is always a deputy nominated by the parliamentary group who is primarily responsible for a given issue and takes part in the functioning of the issue teams. However, this system is quite new, we are only beginning to use it. That means we are still not quite certain about how it will function in practice, we will see. Now, we are at the very beginning: currently, we are pushing each of the teams to create a single website containing information on the team's activities and how the team's members can be contacted. This, we hope, will make it easier for new party members to reach out to the responsible people when needed.

**So it is basically a liaison between the party's leadership and its members?**

Exactly.

**I presume that there are issues and stances that are vital for the party. In your case, I can imagine one such issue would be transparency and the insistence on the freedom of the Internet, it is basically**

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**what your party has originally been built around, or it at least looks that way. But then, there may be issues which come up quite unexpectedly. As an example, let's take the recent bombing of Syria: you wake up in the morning and are suddenly faced with a situation that requires an urgent response. Your leader Ivan Bartoš complained on Facebook that already in the morning on the day of the bombing, he had to respond to numerous questions by journalists, often quite repetitive. Isn't it difficult to respond to unexpected situations without having the time to consult with the membership?**

I guess that's what the party chairman or deputy chairmen are there for. It is their task to get a feeling of what the members may think and to come up with a stance that correspond to the overall opinion within the party at large. Often, he also has to balance the different opinions within the party on a given issue. I think that in the case of Syria, we have been quite successful in managing that. On the one hand, I think we have made it clear that we want to avoid being perceived as a country uncritically pandering to our allies. We have made it clear we would not uncritically support every action taken by our allies in the international arena. For instance, we would object to uncritically supporting our participation in conflicts such as the Iraq War or other contentious involvements. On the other hand, however, we absolutely want to avoid being associated with the other extreme, that is being dubbed "Russophiles" or something like that. We are the last ones to support Russia or to be in any way associated with it.

**Speaking of which, I have heard you have managed to get the Communists out of this very office.**

Yes, that is correct!

**Moving to things such as the formation of fs or an election campaign. Does the leadership have any prerogatives vis-à-vis the rank and file? Could you as the leadership decide, for instance, that you want to move the party in a certain direction, let's say programmatically, and that is it?**

That certainly happens. It is a process we call intra-party elections, where candidates for the positions in the party presidium present their vision as to what should be done in the party. For instance, I came up with the idea to introduce a system of coordinators, which led to the formation of the role of regional coordinators. Currently, there is one in each region of the country. I, for instance, used to be a deputy chairman directly responsible for the preparation of our manifesto. In the end, I worked closely with each of the guarantors to make sure the manifesto will be appealing to everyone who reads it. I made sure to get rid of long, vague passages that would be uninteresting to our potential voters, and instead include specific solutions to specific problems, with specific mechanisms that could be used to later evaluate whether we really kept our promises in the end.

**So you as the leadership are primarily responsible for the formation of manifestos?**

No, that is the responsibility of the teams. They discuss their parts of the manifestos from a professional point of view, then they come up with a draft, and I am the one who tells them "Look, I absolutely don't get this part, this part is dull and doesn't make any sense. Besides, let's say you only have three minutes. Explain to me what our proposals are for the Transportation Department in those three minutes." And the person has to explain it to me, and if he or she says something different to what is actually written in our manifesto, I tell him "You are wrong, work on it some more."

**You have just reminded me of what Ivan Bartoš mentioned in his nomination speech at the party's congress this January. He expressed a desire to turn the party into "a structure intended to**

**accommodate several thousand members". You also touched upon it at the beginning: you implied that things like the discussion board might actually complicate things. So how do you see the party developing into the future? Do you think that some changes of the organizational structure will be necessary?**

I believe we are absolutely lacking an adequate platform to communicate among each other; we are lacking an electronic support system of the functioning of the party, that is a fact. The discussion board is extremely backward, it is underdeveloped. It is like comparing a sophisticated accounting system with a calculator. Speaking of which, we have just initiated a project aiming to introduce transparent accounting into the party, something that would actually feel like belonging into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. And we should definitely create something similar in the way we communicate internally. This belief comes from the basics of sociology and psychology according to which, if a group is to cooperate in a meaningful way, it should be limited in size. That is why we have created the issue teams, for example. There have to be segments responsible for different things. We of course want to include principles of direct democracy into the system. On the other hand, we should make sure members are not overburdened with direct democracy. Every year, there are about forty polls within the party, which is then negatively reflected in the voter turnout, and we also get complaints that we excessively bother our members with trivial stuff.

**Your statutes currently stipulate that one fifth of the party's members can initiate an inspection of every decision the party has taken, which automatically halts that decision's enforceability, do you think such a measure would be sustainable if the party expands in the future?**

That would be no problem because the larger the party gets, the more difficult it is to invoke this inspection. By the way, the number of members for this regulation to be invoked has changed, I believe. Now, you need to gather the votes corresponding to two times the square root of the total number of members.

**And the current number of members is around five hundred?**

I think it is over six hundred, but the number is only increasing very slowly. It is a huge problem. We have not still mastered the introduction process for new members or the career growth process for new members. Unfortunately, we have not been very successful in guiding new members in what they should do when they join, how to realize their full potential, how to connect with people who could be helpful. New members should by no means be dragged into useless discussions on the internet discussion board, it is utterly unproductive.

**I have noticed that after the election, interest in joining the party has soared; success appears to attract. Does that mean you are actively slowing down the intake of new members?**

I would not say we are actively slowing it down, but we are simply not managing as well as we should, in my opinion. Of course, our staff is doing what they can. We have coordinators who should reach out to new members and offer potential areas for involvement. But especially in light of the regional elections coming up in the autumn, I am deeply convinced that the party is growing very slowly. For instance, we have been unsuccessful so far in creating an IT support system which smaller groups within the party could use. And the discussion board is definitely not such a system. It is a killer of any meaningful social interaction within the party.

**Do you think the discussion board will eventually disappear or undergo a drastic change?**

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I think it is only a matter of time before it disappears and will be superseded by a better system.

**Do you still want to preserve the important role of the rank and file, even under this new system?**

Definitely.

**Let me just go back to the way manifestos are created. Your role is to coordinate the teams responsible for manifesto preparation...**

Correct. The teams present us with drafts of their sections of the manifestos, we argue over the points, coordinate, compile a final version. This final version then goes to the National Committee of the party, which is one of the top bodies in the party.

**Is it likely that any member of the party could influence how the manifesto looks in the end?**

Definitely. Rank and file members can be part of the working groups preparing the manifestos. And then, members of the National Committee can comment on the submitted version based on their prior discussions with the membership.

**A group of members can also order the National Committee do act in a certain way, right?**

That is also possible, yes.

**How often does that happen?**

I don't like to measure activity by the number of proposals the members submit. In reality, we are a political party, and as such our primary goal is to get into positions of power and turn our manifesto into reality. The way I see it, rank and file members should be primarily active on the local level, to work in their regions. That is, I think, their priority for now. I would even say it is good when the members submit fewer proposals because that means they do not bother the others that much. The 2017 election is behind us, we have an approved manifesto. Naturally, manifestos are compiled before an election and voters choose the manifesto and the party that best suits their opinions. After the election, there should be no substantial changes to the manifesto because it has been legitimized by the voters. That is why, for now, our members should focus on the upcoming regional election.

**Does that mean that following an election, the importance of the rank and file slightly decreases, and the main responsibility is taken up by you as elected representatives?**

You could probably put it that way. But as I am saying, the members should now be primarily active in the regions, as this then gives rise to a new party elite in the future. And if, in two, three or four years, we have the ambition to form a government, we will need deputies who on the one hand will be able to become ministers, and on the other members who will be qualified enough to become elected representatives in a future Parliament. And those will be successful members from the regions. That is the main tool how society voices its opinions through democratic means.

**Do you want to open more so that you attract more competent people for the future?**

Sure. People are mainly attracted to us during a campaign. That is why we want to turn this upcoming campaign into a bit of a recruiting campaign as well. We are going to say "Come and help us change something in your town or city". This will hopefully attract new people who will then be connected to their

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regional committees of the party, and, as a secondary effect, come into touch with nationwide politics as well.

**Would you say direct democracy is strongest and most useful on the local level?**

Yes. And the issues dealt with on the local level are also the most pressing issues. On the nationwide level, our manifesto is done and we can't change much. The members can direct us to do something and we can tell them "Thanks for the input. We will consider it". Still, we are mainly interested in pursuing the manifesto we were elected for.

**Effectively, you are now quite autonomous. At the outset, you cooperated with the members in compiling the manifesto, but now you are largely on your own.**

I think you can't really have it any other way. We work here full-time and get paid quite good money for doing our jobs the best we can. And we certainly want to do our jobs. Of course, we can debate with members, and it is important to debate with them. They can still submit their inputs, but I would say it's mostly important on the local level.

**They can submit their inputs through the discussion board or the Forum?**

Mainly through the working groups. But it also works well in the regions. I would say I meet with members about twice a month, for instance at events intended for newcomers, or at regional party meetings. And I talk to people at those events. Whenever I see someone has a good idea, I would take him or her aside and ask him to work on it for us. I would say that in this respect, we maintain really close relationships with the members.

**Ivan Bartoš recently mentioned that it is becoming increasingly difficult for you to meet with the members, as politics has become a full-time job for you, while it is still a voluntary activity for most members.**

That is certainly true. But still, there are some positive examples. God, until 2014, I myself was a volunteer and did not earn a penny working for the party. For over five years, I worked for the party very hard and in my free time. It is perfectly normal to be a volunteer in the party, and we want it to stay that way. Those who get paid should by no means be the only ones working for the party. Yes, we do get money for our jobs, but we have a completely different level of responsibility for this country now that we are elected compared to other members. The rank and file members are not accountable to anyone. The members can work for us as volunteers, and if they are ambitious enough and want to turn something into reality, they have a very good chance. Our Members of Parliament are always willing to meet with him, and he can push through whatever he wants.

**That was my last question. Thank you so much for your time and answers!**

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## Appendix D – Interview with Mikuláš Ferjenčík

**You have been a member of the party since its foundation in 2009. What do you perceive to be the biggest change in the party's internal organization since then, if any?**

At the beginning, there were only a few people active in the party. That meant that the whole party organization was always working on only one thing, together. For example, when we worked on the campaign against the ACTA, everyone was fully devoted to that. Everyone was participating in the local election campaign, in the campaign against Internet censorship etc. This was the original model of the party's functioning. The organization proceeded linearly – one issue meant one team working to come up with a solution. Later, as more people joined the party, we started working on multiple things at the same time. It is no longer possible to follow everything that goes on within the party. This has got even more difficult after we have entered the Parliament last year.

**Would you say that due to this increasing complexity, the leadership is becoming more distant vis-à-vis the rank and file members? Is it becoming more difficult to coordinate issue stances, for example?**

We are doing our best for it not to be this way. But I think that the problem is more the opposite: for the rank and file, it is now much more difficult to stay informed about what goes on within the party. On the other hand, the advantage is that a lot of our stances are conveyed by the media. Then, if the member does not understand or agree with a stance, he can reach out to us and ask. The election has effectively given us new means to communicate with our members: through the media.

**I had a feeling that the internet discussion board was one of the main means of communication within the party. However, Mr. Michálek now mentioned that the board is not really an effective tool and that he rather relies on personal relations with the members, such as meetings on the weekends. How do you see the discussion board?**

I think the board has not been the primary means of communication, and of effecting change for a long time now. When a person now wants to achieve something within the party, it is no longer enough to start a thread on the discussion board. It used to be the case for a long time though. That era is, however, long gone. And I even think that it is one of the reasons why we succeeded last year.

**Isn't that paradoxical?**

Well, our first successful campaign was that of Libor Michálek, when he got into the Senate back in 2012. That time, we pretty much ran a traditional campaign. Each week, the election committee met and made executive decisions. The campaign was largely offline. The next successful run was in 2014, for the Prague City Council election.

**The European Parliament election was also quite close.**

It was, but we weren't elected, so it wasn't really a success. In the Prague City Council election, we also functioned offline, and it was much more efficient.

**And when you functioned offline, the electoral team would meet and make the important decisions alone?**



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Mostly, we have directly elected members who are then directly responsible for a certain area. We also run open tenders where we look for people external to the party who then provide us with certain results. Typically, we would hire an external election manager or a campaign strategist. Those people would then meet and make decisions which are then also published for the rank and file members to see. But those decisions are taken during personal meetings, as usual, not in a thread on the discussion board.

**Does a rank and file member of the party have a chance of influencing you, or the team directly responsible for an election campaign?**

The rank and file members mostly have a lot of informal means of influencing us. Typically, they would just call me, send me a Facebook message or an SMS, or meets me. Alternatively, the members also directly vote for the people who later assume positions of power within the party. We rely on direct elections a lot. I am the chairman of the Media Department and I was directly elected. The party's leadership is directly elected. Then there is the Member Initiative, which gives our members a chance to put forward a proposal which the party should discuss. When they gather the required number of signatures, so to speak, the party discusses the initiative.

**I had the feeling that a lot of those things, such as voting, happened through the discussion board.**

Right. But the board has transformed from a tool for deliberation into rather a tool for voting, publishing important documents and so on. It has turned into a tool for formal processes, but not for meaningful communication. To give you an example. For a potential Member Initiative, support is now mainly gathered through dedicated Facebook groups and social media that connect the members. So the main coordination happens elsewhere; the discussion board is merely a tool for taking the final decision on an issue. Let's say a member wishes that the legalization of cannabis becomes the party's priority. So he would create a thread on the discussion board, to formally start the initiative, but then gather support through Facebook. The discussion board is then only one of many bubbles to attract attention.

**Would you say that the leadership has some prerogatives which the rank and file members simply cannot influence, no matter what they do?**

Well, the leadership takes decisions within the party. And a lot of those decisions are taken without consulting the members. It only depends on the leadership's political cost-benefit analysis, their accountability, and confidence. It depends on whether they have confidence that their actions will be approved by the members, or they rather prefer discussing it with the membership beforehand. I would say that in this respect, the party has moved more towards a top-down, directive leadership style.

**Is that because the leadership itself has become more authoritative, directive?**

I wouldn't say so. Rather, I would say it has become more confident to fully assume the role it has been vested with. Ultimately, I believe that when a person, instead of doing his job, turns to the membership all the time and bothers them with nonsense, it even harms democracy as such because it prevents them from focusing on the really important things. On the other hand, the leadership faces the potential danger of being dismissed by the members. At any point, signatures can be gather and the given leadership member can be forced to resign. This is the way the party ensures accountability and control of people in positions of power.

**If I understand you correctly, the leadership does enjoy autonomy in the decisions it takes, but has to take into account that whenever it fails, it can be dismissed by the members.**

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Exactly right.

**According to the statutes, the most important body within the party is the National Forum, which meets in person at least once a year and every member of the party is a member of the National Forum. Can discussions or threads initiated on the internet discussion board be considered part of the National Forum?**

The internet discussion board specifies the topics discussed by the National Forum. This does not mean that any thread started on the board is part of the National Forum. But, whenever a Member Initiative is started in the relevant section of the board and gather the required support, the leadership calls a meeting of the National Forum regarding the given initiative. Then, all members get a vote on the initiative.

**Right. So you don't necessarily have to meet physically.**

Correct.

**What caught my attention in the statutes is that a group of members within the National Forum – or the party - can initiate an inspection of any decision taken within the party, which automatically halts the decision's enforceability until the inspection is over. The group needed for the inspection to be initiated used to be a fifth of the total number of members. However, you recently decreased the number to two time the square root of the total number of members. Was that also because it was becoming more difficult to gather the support as the party is getting bigger?**

Correct. It is also based in our beliefs regarding direct democracy. If we were to extrapolate the rule to the national level, it wouldn't make sense to need the signatures of one fifth of the total number of citizens in the country, for example.

**You wanted to make it easier for the members to initiate the inspection.**

Yes, that was why the change was approved.

**But a while ago, you also implied that it is better for the leadership to have autonomy over the decisions it takes. So how do you justify that you want to make inspections easier for the members?**

It is easy. The leadership takes a certain decision and when the members don't like it, they can challenge it. At that point, the leadership has a chance to defend their decision and it tries to prevent the membership challenge from being successful in the end.

**Could the leadership hypothetically decide to ignore the opinion of the membership and push through their own decision?**

That would probably lead to the leadership being dismissed by the members. The member initiative is a control mechanism that is only seldom used, I think about three times a year in total. The vast majority of decisions is taken without any kind of challenge.

**So it is not the case that the party would be paralyzed as a result of this right that the membership holds?**

No. It is not the case that, for instance, we would wait for fourteen days by default, for any potential challenges, and only then the decision would enter into force. That is not the case.

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**What caught my attention was that whenever a decision is challenged, it loses enforceability until the challenge is solved. So I was wondering whether the party is paralyzed by this or not.**

It would only lose enforceability after the members have gathered the required number of signatures. And as I said, it does not happen often at all.

**Mr. Michálek mentioned that trolls have appeared on the internet discussion board and that they destroy any meaningful conversation. Still, it does not happen that such members would gather signatures just for fun, to stall the party's activity on purpose?**

No, that does not happen.

**Would you say that the relationship of the leadership to the rank and file has changed after the party's election to the Chamber? A new organizational structure has appeared, the parliamentary group. Has that affected the contact you have with the members?**

What has changed is that a lot of the real responsibility within the party has moved to the parliamentary group. And it will take some time until the party processes that change and learns to live with it. A good example are the manifesto guarantors. Whereas before the election, they were merely the main go-to people for specific parts of the manifesto, now they have largely become consultants for the responsible elected deputies. Before, the guarantors were the ones who would issue an official statement of the party on a given issue. Now, the media is mainly interested in our MPs.

**Whenever you need to clarify the party's position on an issue, would you more like discuss it with the responsible deputy rather than the membership at large?**

We are mainly trying to abide by the manifesto, which has been approved by all our members. The membership has also approved our twenty main priorities for the election, and even made some changes that were contrary to the original proposals of the leadership. Ultimately, it is largely a consensual document. When smaller things come up, we deal with them in an ad hoc manner. As for the relationship between the leadership and members, I think the leadership is really trying to actually meet with the members. We regularly invite members to our offices here in Parliament. Every week, one of our MPs does an internet stream for party members and supporters, where they have thirty minutes to ask their questions. It was also discussed in the leadership prior to the January meeting of the National Forum that it would probably be a good idea to include people that are not our elected deputies in the leadership. Unfortunately, however, the membership has not generated any suitable candidates who would be able to succeed in the election.

**Do you think that the relationship between you and the members got more complicated after the election?**

I would even say that it has improved because a lot of people now have much more time now that they are paid to do politics. I am elected for the Pardubice Region and since the election, I have not missed a single meeting of the regional party committee, for example. So the election also had a lot of advantages in this respect. Besides, it has allowed us to build a support apparatus, hire assistants. The difference is that our elected deputies wield a lot of power by the very nature of their new position, which means they don't need confirmation by the membership.

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**Did they need such a confirmation before the election?**

Before the election, when the leadership wanted to achieve something, it was practically impossible without consent of the members. For instance, getting to the media as a party with two percent of support requires cooperation by many different people. And everyone who disagrees might effectively destroy all the effort. On the other hand, when the person is an elected representative in the Parliament, he simply takes the decision and that is it. I would say that the relations with the members still need some tweaking. Recently, we discussed it within our parliamentary group that we would like to devise a system through which the members could get more involved in the process of proposing laws in the Parliament.

**How do you see the relationship with the membership developing in the future?**

We are trying to develop a network that would allow the members to get involved in the working groups led by the responsible deputies. They are going to be getting regular newsletters pertaining only to the given area of interest, so that they are not overburdened with information. Everyone will have a chance to say what interests him. He will then get updates in the area. A lot of times, we would also ask for the members' opinions; we often send out polls. We have recently asked for the members' opinion on enabling a nationwide referendum, on the potential support for the government. Funnily, journalists were surprised that we didn't discuss the party's stance towards the government during the last party congress. It was simply because we knew from the polls that 95% of our members were opposed to us supporting the government, so there was nothing to discuss.

**And those polls would take place on the discussion board?**

Yes. Just recently we ran a poll on the Prague City Council election manifesto there. In the future, we are going to try to improve the technological side of the members' communication with the leadership. The discussion board, for instance, is very limited in how it allows the members to comment on a proposed law. We will also need to upgrade our newsletter system and so on.

**The decision-making process must have surely become a lot faster for you now that you are in Parliament. Before the election, you could potentially debate a given issue for unlimited periods of time, whereas now your stance is probably needed much more quickly. What would you do in a situation where your stance is needed really quickly and you might not have time to consult the members?**

Well, recently we ran a poll regarding the church restitutions law. Effectively, we are able to gather the members' opinions within a day from a representative sample. So I would say we are quite quick. The second necessary thing is to have a set of principles and values. On a lot of things, we have already formed a clear opinion, so we are able to vote as needed. Of course, sometimes the given stance is subject to interpretation, for example when two opposing principles get into conflict with each other.

**When composing a manifesto, the leadership compiles a draft which then the members can comment?**

Yes. The manifesto is approved by the National Committee, which is basically our intra-party parliament, composed of the chairmen of each of the party's regional committees and other elected members. In addition, we also composed the election priorities, which were approved by all members, and an election strategy, also approved by all members. And the party's candidate for Prime Minister is elected in primaries.

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**What if the membership wanted to change parts of the manifesto?**

The best way would be to informally reach out to a member of the National Committee and ask him to propose a change. If they do not succeed, members can always try the Member Initiative. We mainly try to rely on informal means, though.

**Ivan Bartoš recently mentioned that it is becoming increasingly coordinate with members.**

Well, maybe it's becoming more difficult. On the other hand, I think that bodies such as the National Committee function better now than they used to in the past. As a party represented in the Chamber, the decisions taken by the Committee have a much larger impact now. However, it is certainly more difficult now for a rank and file member to push something through within the party. We currently have 681 members, and coordination is certainly more difficult than when there was only 150 of us.

**To quote from the Codex, a Pirate representative commits himself to "heed a decision taken by the National Forum, whenever possible". This came across as a bit vague.**

We try to write the statutes so that they correspond to reality. And unfortunately, when you go to a meeting with Faltýnek and he demands a response from you, you have to answer before you have time to run a poll on the discussion board.

**Do you see the organizational structure of the party changing in the future? Of course, not every member can attend a meeting with other MPs. However, would you like to make the relationship between the leadership and the members more efficient in the future, get the members more involved?**

I think the key is to develop adequate technological solutions so that the members can get more involved. Secondly, we also strongly oppose any cumulation of elected positions. When a person does not cumulate positions, he effectively has more time to interact with the members.

**Would you have an estimate as to how many members of the party are usually involved in important decisions?**

In a poll, usually over 50% of the members vote. Out of the 680 current members, at least 400 tend to be quite involved.

**Ivan Bartoš also mentioned he would like to turn the party into a structure capable of accommodating several thousand members. Mr. Michálek added that accepting new members has been a complicated, slow process. How do you perceive a potential expansion of the party?**

I think it is necessary, and I think it is getting slightly faster. After the election, we had over 500 members. But of course, it poses an enormous strain.

**How do you see the role of the leadership in accepting new members? Some other Pirate parties throughout the world have quite loose rules for accepting new members. Would you like to be selective with potential members?**

We have rules for that in place. Regional committees are in charge of accepting members. When illicit practices are suspected, the regional branch can even be dissolved. Up till now, we have not had cases of suspicious behavior in the branches. Generally, we are trying not to accept outright strange people, but the

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party remains quite open. People who volunteered before the election are now being accepted, and those who came after the election are now in the process. When accepting new members, the regional representatives aim to at least meet with them twice, to get to know them. To give an example of the Swedish Pirate Party. I know how they operated, and reality was quite far from what they presented. Officially, they acted as if they had tens of thousands of members, but then only about forty would show up for an important vote. The Swedish Pirate Party has not managed to get their organizational structure right. They have not even tried to turn into an organization that would manage multiple tasks at once. The chairman felt a need to manage the party from the top, which did not work. They only focused on campaigns and never really built a true community around the party. They also haven't addressed topics considered relevant by the public.

**At the beginning, you mentioned that you believe one of the main reasons behind your success was that the discussion board did not play an important role in the 2017 campaign. What do you think the recipe would be for continued success? To remain rather decentralized, or move to a more top-down approach?**

First, which is something on which I disagree with Jirka Kadeřábek, the founder of the party, I think that a lot depends on the people currently in the leadership. Compared to the Swedish Pirates, for example, I really believe Ivan Bartoš is a much better chairman than the Swedish party chairman.

**What is so special about Ivan Bartoš? Is it his charisma, leadership skills?**

Mainly, he is a devoted democrat. When most members advocate a decision is not so happy with, he is willing to accept it, he does not push his views. Things inside the party don't have to be his way. Of course, on most issues he is in agreement with the party, but there are issues on which he disagrees. But still, he does not push his personal agenda against the wishes of the party. He doesn't have to have the final say only to appear in the media more often. This is a very good personality trait. He is a very consensual person. He does not thrive on conflict, but rather looks for consensus. So the level of unity within the leadership is very important. I think it is vital to support intra-party mechanisms that support looking for consensus and party unity, to actively prevent trouble within the party.

**You don't think it is necessary to allow for a more top-down approach now that the party is expanding?**

I think it is more than enough when candidates for leadership positions clearly state what they want to do once elected, and then really keep their promises.

**Are you saying that the membership should express their opinions in leadership elections, and then give you more autonomy once in power?**

I think that mostly, the leadership already knows what the members think. Especially on big and important issues such as support of ANO, EET, or other big topics of the day. It is enough to keep those opinions in mind and still maintain some level of dialogue within the party. When it becomes clear that a certain issue is more complicated than it might have seemed at first, we should discuss it more.

**Is it still possible for you to discuss with the members, even now that you have much more work here in Parliament and are probably more distant to the rank and file?**

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I think we are still successful, and in some respects, we have much more capacity to discuss than before. It reminds me of a recent situation in the Prague City Council. There, we were negotiating to enter a coalition after the last election. And according to our election strategy, any agreement to enter a coalition had to be approved by the party membership. And as I said, if we could not explain why we should be in that coalition to our own members, the people who are closest to us, who know us the most, how are we supposed to explain ourselves to the voters? It works the same now. There is fog between the active members, the other members, party supporters, and the public. But you simply know that you pissed them off when it happens. You just know. You also know when you should insist on your opinion, just as you realize when it's time to bow and admit you are going to do something differently. So I think it's enough to simply be attentive to the atmosphere within and around the party and you will be just fine.

**You said that the role of the leadership is big. I'm just thinking. Can it be the case that the party is currently quite open to what the members think largely because the leadership wants it to be that way? What if, hypothetically, new leaders came who would start to ignore the membership?**

And why would the members vote for such leaders?

**So there still are strong control mechanisms which do not allow a hypothetical new leadership to "hijack" the party?**

Absolutely. The members absolutely insist on intra-party dialogue. Besides, Jakub Michálek, who does very hard work within the party, has been subjected to the control mechanisms himself. My sister, also a Pirate party member, is much more consensual than Jakub, and in the end she got many more votes than he did in the party leadership election, although he did a lot more work than my sister. So even Jakub, who really works hard, always has to consider when it's worth to debate with the members and when it is not necessary. To be honest, people want to keep their parliamentary positions here, even in the future. And if we ignore the members, that's unlikely to happen. We even have primaries for positions on the list of candidates, and it's impossible to get nominated without contact with the members.

**You mentioned that the leader is important. What else would you say is key in expanding the party to a larger number of members, as Ivan wants it?**

I think that now after the upcoming regional election, we will have to look for mechanisms to deal with trouble. How to deal with a local politician that messes something up? I think that will be a great challenge.

**Has something like that ever happened before?**

Some small things.

**You had a deputy chairman who openly advocated Czechia leaving NATO, that was a huge affair.**

It was, and he was dismissed. But in itself, having a different opinion on an issue doesn't disqualify you from holding a position within the party. I meant trouble such as a local politician accepting a lucrative position in exchange for a political "favor". We already have checks and balances to deal with this in the party documents, but we haven't really had a chance to try them in practice, as it hasn't happened so far. So it is certainly going to be a challenge into the future. Also, developing more advanced technological solutions is also a must.

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**One of the most common critiques of the party is that you are hard to read, that your stances are hard to identify. What do you think is the most important aspect that anchors you? What are the checks that ensure we don't wake up tomorrow and find a Pirate Party that wishes to leave NATO?**

The main thing is that the Party has grown from a very personal connection of the people to their surroundings. The first few campaigns were done solely over Facebook, through our friends. And that's also where the main accountability lies. When an ANO deputy messes up, no one in his town will ever find out. But if I were to mess up, I wouldn't be able to enter my favorite pub back home. That is the key control mechanism, really. The people in the party have worked all the way up, starting with the people closest to them. They haven't got into the Parliament only because someone put their faces on a massive ad and people just voted for them. But our friends and supporters convinced their friends we were the right choice. That is the strongest check. As for us leaving NATO, I ran a survey on it and only about 25% of members wanted to leave NATO three years ago. Today, the figure is even smaller. So it's only a very few people, and they have no chance of pushing their opinion through, not only through the direct democracy within the party. The second biggest safeguard is that people join the party according to the policies we advocate. Those who criticize us for being hard to read don't understand that the Pirates agree on a different set of principles than the other parties. We agree on the need to open up the state, that developing technologies is important, that we should analyze what the impact of digitalization on our lives will be, that it is necessary to deal with copyright law. There was also widespread agreement in terms of taxes: we agreed it is necessary to decrease the tax burden of individuals and instead look for other sources of tax income, to make sure pensions can be paid for. Still, some try to fit us into the old categories: are you leftist or rightist? And then, what happens is that when we advocate both decreasing the taxes for individuals and increasing them for large corporations, we suddenly don't fit any category. This is, I think, the main source of the misunderstanding behind our party's values. In fact, there is consensus on a lot of things. New members realize it as well. The only problem is that our consensus may not fit the established categories. That is also why Babiš is successful. He doesn't care at all about the stances he advocates, as long as they don't interfere with his business interests. We, on the other hand, advocate what we really believe to be good things. In some ways, this is certainly our advantage, but it also is a limiting factor compared to catch-all parties like ANO. In fact, even Kalousek would be capable of advocating a manifesto that would be 50% different to the values his party now professes. He doesn't care. The same with a lot of Social Democrats. They could very well be members of the ODS or SPD and would never tell the difference.

**Thank you very much for your answers, I really appreciate your openness.**