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## CEC Election Brief

# CZECH REPUBLIC – GENERAL ELECTIONS 2013

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### ***“Socialist Pyrrhus and Conservative Dwarfs”***

Early elections will not likely save the Czech Republic from year-lasting political deadlock. After seven years in opposition, the Social Democrats (ČSSD) were unable to harvest the fruit of an incessant series of corruption scandals of centre-right governments. Party chairman Bohuslav Sobotka suffered a Pyrrhic victory in convincing only 20,5 % of voters. No winning party in history<sup>1</sup> has ever obtained fewer votes and 94 out of 200 seats are occupied by parties whose programmes are turned against the heritage of last 20 years of democratic regime. In such constellation of 7 parties in the Parliament, including a return of the far-right after a 15-year absence, should any coalition comprise at least three parties with contradictory political programmes. A more likely option is a pragmatic solution based on concrete political deals that would stop the constant increase of anti-system parties through their inclusion for a limited amount of time before the next early elections.

### ***Decline of Traditional Parties***

President Zeman will have to change his strategy to unify the left under his leadership. He does not have a pretext for breaking the taboo of inviting the Communist party (KSČM) to the government for the first time after the fall of the Communist regime. A scenario of pure leftist government is out of the game, although KSČM received more votes (14,91 %) compared to the last elections<sup>2</sup>. Zeman's own party (SPOZ) is the biggest loser of this election (1,51 %). Out of the 2,7 million who voted for Zeman in January's presidential elections, nine months later only 75,000 voted for the “presidential” party.<sup>3</sup> Zeman has been a part of the political scene of the last two decades and his call to a “new beginning” was not convincing enough for his electorate, which opted for brand-new movements led by businessmen Andrej Babiš and Tomio Okamura.

In a surprising second position is billionaire Babiš and his movement ANO 2011<sup>4</sup> (18,65 %), who collected the frustrated half-hearted voters of Social Democrats (who supported Zeman in presidential elections instead of party candidate Dienstbier), voters of the disintegrated Public Affairs party (VV) and part of the technocratic conservative voters impressed by Babiš' business achievements<sup>5</sup>. Without Babiš' 47 MPs, most with right-wing stances<sup>6</sup>, no government coalition is

<sup>1</sup> 20,45 % (ČSSD 2013), 22,08 % (ČSSD 2010), 35,38 % (ODS 2006), 30,20 % (ČSSD 2002), 32,31 % (ČSSD 1998), 29,62 % (ODS 1996) ([www.volby.cz](http://www.volby.cz)).

<sup>2</sup> 11,7 % in 2010 ([www.volby.cz](http://www.volby.cz)).

<sup>3</sup> His own popularity however is still over 50% in opinion polls (STEM 9/2013).

<sup>4</sup> “ANO” means “YES” in Czech.

<sup>5</sup> Andrej Babiš is the second richest Czech citizen and the owner of agro-chemical holding Agrofert.

<sup>6</sup> E.g. former senator of Liberal Reformist Party, former chief-commentator of biggest right-wing daily, former country manager of Microsoft, MP who claims Margaret Thatcher as political ideal, etc. ([www.anobudelip.cz](http://www.anobudelip.cz)).

feasible. With the lowest coalition potential, the far-right political project of Czech-Japanese businessman Okamura, “Dawn of Direct Democracy” (Úsvit, 6,88 %), will rather stay out of the game. The anti-European movement “Cheer-up!”, supported by former President Vaclav Klaus, obtained only 0,42 % of votes.

The traditional democratic right has been split into three dwarfish parties. Elections confirmed a deep drawdown of the leading party of Czech transition to democracy, ODS, which was founded and later abandoned by Klaus. The party that garnered more than 35 % of votes in 2006 has now dropped to 7,72 % and lost leadership of the right in favour of TOP 09 (11,99 %), led by Karel Schwarzenberg and Miroslav Kalousek. With an almost century-long history in Czech politics, Christian Democrats, who were kicked out of the Chamber in 2010 by TOP 09<sup>7</sup>, convinced pro-European conservative voters – fed up with the scandals of ODS – and returned to politics with 6,78 % of votes.

### ***What comes next?***

ČSSD leader Sobotka now bears the burden of responsibility for the composition of the government – wishfully before the end of the year. For all other players, the easiest way not to betray voters is to go to the opposition. President Zeman may use his role to become an arbiter of fragmented political scene and try to arrange a political deal between Social Democrats, ANO and possibly Christian Democrats which would enable all sides not to admit full responsibility for such compromise. Unlike this summer, where President filled power vacuum left after Nečas government, the decisive element of the current crisis – Andrej Babiš – have no reason why to submit to Presidential authority. For now ANO refuses to participate directly in the government (which might change), and it is willing to support government without Communist Party and parties of previous right-wing government.

### ***Possible scenarios:***

- Either minority government of ČSSD supported by ANO 2011 and Christian Democrats or an open coalition of these. It is the most likely option in terms of programme priorities, even though there might be some obstacles (ANO’s unwillingness to participate on the government, clashes between Social and Christian Democrats on Church Restitution Plan and ANO’s refusal to higher taxes). This formation would be characterised by omnipresent struggle of leaders of the two strongest parties (Babiš and Sobotka).
- Coalition of ČSSD and ANO 2011, supported by either KŠČM or Úsvit. Social Democrats declared before the elections Communists would be their partner of preference. This could translate into a support of the coalition of the two main parties. ANO however declared it does not want to cooperate with them. Similar role could be played by Úsvit, who is however rather unpredictable and could prove to be a very unstable supporter.
- Minority government of ČSSD supported by unlikely mixture of KŠČM and TOP09. Miroslav Kalousek, then leader of Christian Democrats, tried to negotiate this coalition in 2006. However, his current party would probably not let him do so.
- Coalition of right wing parties led by ANO (ANO 2011, ODS, TOP 09 and KDU-ČSL together possess 103 votes) would be highly unstable and harmful for ANO which also ruled out the cooperation with ODS and TOP09. Winner of the elections, Social democrats, will finish in the opposition.
- Early elections. Currently, the new parties in the parliament declare, they are not willing to join any government and want only to support certain motions (ANO’s reconstruction of the state, Úsvit’s direct democracy). This would prevent any stable government from materialising and could ultimately lead to new elections in May (together with EP elections). There, ANO would be the most likely winner.

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<sup>7</sup> TOP 09 was founded by former chairman of the Christian Democratic Party Miroslav Kalousek, who led out part of the party members.