



Weekly Briefing

Czech Republic political briefing:

The Czech Republic - political briefing: developments in 2018

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The year 2018 could be summarised by those important political events:

- *Presidential election in January*
- *Negotiations about Czech government and the appointment of the new coalition cabinet in June*
- *The Czech Republic's Senate and municipal elections in October*

Presidential election in January

The first direct presidential election in the Czech Republic was held in January 2013. The second one was in January 2018 for the next 5 years term. The President, Miloš Zeman won the second term to retain his office. His rival candidate in final round of presidential election was Jiří Drahoš, former chairman of the Czech Academy of Sciences (from 2009 to 2017), a chemical engineer who presented himself a centrist politician. Mr. Zeman won the first round of presidential election with 38,6 % of the vote compared with 26,6 % for Drahoš. A former diplomat and President Václav Havel's advisor, Pavel Fischer, was the third with 10,2 % of the vote. Mr. Zeman won also the second and final round of the election with 51,36 % of the vote compare to Mr. Drahoš's 48,63 %. The presidential election had a turnout of 66,6 % (the highest since the 1998). The country was sharply divided between two political blocs that cut across old left-right allegiances. The liberal opposition has shown an ability to unite against Zeman and garner almost 50% of the vote. Mr. Drahoš preferred the Czech Republic to be closely oriented towards Western countries in contrast with President Zeman, who has been rather a proponent of multipolar world with a cooperation with the European Union, China, Russia, Izrael and also the USA (Mr. Zeman referred to the policy of "tous azimuts" – which is the French expression used by President De Gaulle). It means that Czech diplomacy should be open in all directions: the West, the East, and the South. The stance of President Zeman towards China is well-known; he is a strong supporter of closer ties with China, which has raised fears and critique from small right-wing political parties (especially TOP 09 and STAN, and partly KDU-ČSL) and some Western-oriented Czech citizens. Mr. Zeman has been supporting cancelling the EU sanctions against Russia after Krym annexation; he is sometimes criticized for

departure from advocating for human rights in Czech foreign policy and advocating for China and Russia.

Negotiations about Czech government and the appointment of the new coalition cabinet in June

The Chamber of Deputies (in Czech: Poslanecká sněmovna) is the lower house of the bicameral Parliament of the Czech Republic with 200 members. After general election to the Chamber of Deputies in October 2017 the new minority government was formed by the winning party ANO (Action of Dissatisfied Citizens) movement led by Mr. Babiš. In January 2018 the government did not pass the confidence vote in the Chamber of Deputies. ANO started political negotiations aiming at forming a stable new government. The Czech Republic is unitary parliamentary constitutional republic, in which the President is the head of state and the Prime Minister is the head of government. The executive powers of President are limited. One of them is that he appoints the Prime Minister after a general election. The president Zeman allowed Mr. Babiš a second attempt to form a new government. A new minority government has been passed vote of confidence in June 2018 when the 15 MPs of the Communist party of Bohemia and Moravia (KSCM) provided the votes needed to allow a minority coalition formed between Babiš's ANO movement and the Social Democrats (ČSSD) nearly nine months after election when the Czech Republic was governed by temporary administrations. But protracted coalition negotiations are common also in other European countries (e. g. in Germany which served in fact as a model in this case). Programme of the new Czech government was formulated by coalition parties (ANO and ČSSD), and should be realised in next years.

The Czech Republic's Senate and municipal elections in October

The Legislature in the Czech Republic is bicameral, with the Chamber of Deputies (Poslanecká sněmovna) consisting of 200 members and the Senate (Senát) consisting of 81 members. Both houses together make up the Parliament of the Czech Republic. Senate elections were held in the Czech Republic on 5 and 6 October 2018 alongside municipal elections, with a second round held on 12 and 13 October 2018. The Civic Democratic Party (ODS) won the election with 10 seats. Governing parties ANO 2011 and the Czech Social Democratic Party (ČSSD) were heavily defeated, winning only 1 seat each. The Communist

Party (KSČM) lost its last seat in the Senate, meaning the party would be without representation in the Senate for the first time in the history of Czech Republic. The election was considered the first major win for the opposition to Andrej Babiš' Cabinet. ODS confirmed their position as the main opposition party, ahead of the Czech Pirate Party.

Municipal elections

The ANO 2011 party of Prime Minister Andrej Babiš has won the municipal elections in all regional capitals except Prague – where the opposition Civic Democrats (ODS) and Pirates took first and second, respectively – and Liberec. The losers were the Social Democrats, Communists, and other parties.

Municipal elections in Prague

Municipal elections 2018 were held in Prague in on 5 and 6 October as part of nationwide municipal elections. ANO 2011 won the previous 2014 municipal elections, with Adriana Krnáčová becoming Mayor of Prague. The coalition in Prague consisted until 2018 of Czech Social Democratic Party and Three-Coalition (Green Party; Christian and Democratic Union – Czechoslovak People's Party; Mayors and Independents). All 65 seats of the Prague Assembly were up to elect. The result was a narrow victory of neoliberal-conservative Civic Democratic Party (ODS), which received 17.9 per cent of votes and 14 seats. The ODS won for the fifth time in Prague. Followed by liberal Czech Pirate Party (Piráti), receiving 17.1 per cent (almost 12 per cent more than in 2014 election), and 13 seats. The Praha sobě (English: Prague for itself, 16.6 per cent) and the coalition United Forces for Prague (Spojené síly pro Prahu 16.3 per cent) won 13 seats as well. Centrist ANO, the strongest party of the Czech Republic at that time, as well as the strongest party in Prague, lost 5 seats and 6.7 per cent of votes, receiving 12 seats and 15.4 per cent of votes. The Freedom and Direct Democracy (SPD) received only 3.5 per cent, failed to reach 5% threshold. The Communist Party (KSČM) received 3.3 per cent, and the Czech Social Democratic Party (ČSSD) received 2.9 per cent, both failed to reach the threshold for the first time.

Almost three weeks after the election, the coalition talks, deciding who will lead the Czech capital, have been concluded. Aside from the Pirate Party, the independent movement Praha Sobě and the coalition made up of TOP 09, the Party of Mayors and Independents, and the Christian Democrats, known as Joint Forces for Prague are represented in the City Hall

Council. The coalition is led by the head of Prague's Pirate Party, Zdeněk Hřib – IT specialist in the health sector. This coalition soon started to make changes of some managers in municipal companies (Výstaviště Praha, Technická správy komunikací, Dopravní podnik hlavního města Prahy - that has 11 000 employees and is financed by the city by 13 billion Czech Crowns). Noticeable changes in managements of municipal firms took place also in Brno (new coalition: ODS, Piráti, KDU-ČSL and ČSSD) and on many other places.

Conclusion

Since 1993, the two largest parties were the Civic Democratic Party (ODS) and the Czech Social Democratic Party (ČSSD). This right-left model was for the first time changed in early 2014, and the change was confirmed in 2017, with the rise of a new catch-all political party ANO 2011, which led to weakening of both major parties. Since January 2014, the Czech Republic was ruled by a centre-left coalition, led by the Czech Social Democratic Party, the largest party, with two coalition parties ANO 2011, and KDU-ČSL (the Christian and Democratic Union – Czech People's Party). In May 2017, a government crisis began after the finance minister Andrej Babiš (a leader of ANO) was dismissed, because he has been under investigation over suspicion of schwindling with subsidy fraud from the European Union in the case of farm Čapí hnízdo. It was the problem for coalition negotiations. Now many citizens question whether traditional political parties can handle current challenges and crises. It has also encouraged many to support alternative paths of political action (the Czech Pirate Party) and the rise of ideologically extremist parties (Freedom and Direct Democracy - SPD), nationalists and movements.