



## **Weekly Briefing**

**Czech Republic political briefing:**  
**Rise of the „New Left“ and a Conservative Reaction:**  
**New Constellation**  
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# **Rise of the „New Left“ and a Conservative Reaction: New Constellation**

## **Summary**

*A former political hegemon, the ANO movement, has seemingly lost its dominant position, being overtaken by the Pirate Party according to recent sociological surveys. The Pirates embody the principles of the Western New Left, left-wing liberalism with neo-Marxist elements. A major part of the society does not reflect this ideological background, their support being a manifestation of deep disillusionment with the current Government and also with the anti-crisis policies and practices. The rise of the progressivists together with the long-term suppression of civil rights, freedom and market economy provoked a reaction among (national) conservative circles represented especially by the parliamentary Freedom and Direct Democracy movement on one hand and the former President Václav Klaus on the other. Prospects of the conservative opposition, however, remain unclear.*

## **Introduction**

The dissatisfaction of a substantial part of the Czech society with the ruling Government led by the ANO movement headed by Prime Minister Andrej Babiš has been deepening. The last months brought a change on the domestic political scene which would not have been expected virtually by anyone a year ago. This change rests in a considerable weakening of the long-time hegemon ANO and, at the same time, in the rise of the Pirate Party. According to several March public opinion polls, the Pirates have taken the lead in terms of public support. If such a scenario becomes a reality in the October election to the Chamber of Deputies, it can bring about a different distribution of power in Czech politics for the following years.

## **Wind of change**

A survey carried out by the Median, a leading research agency, during March, indicates that the ANO lost its hegemonic position as well as first place in terms of electoral preferences

for the first time since spring 2014.<sup>1</sup> The increasingly left-orientated ANO get voters from the Social Democratic Party (ČSSD) but lost, concurrently, right-wing supporters and those who were appealed by an innovative style of politics pursued by ANO. The latter consisted of an ideologically ambivalent, pragmatic paradigm which was to make broad support from different social groups and strata possible. The concept of a big-tent movement advancing „non-political politics“ together with an emphasis on expert decision-making void of partisan and ideologically motivated interests, nevertheless, gradually turned into centre-left orientation. PM Andrej Babiš' image of a successful businessman, manager and political leader has been growing pale face to face with the protracted crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Mismanagement and the absence of strategy have become obvious. And the voters' support slumped. According to the Median enquiry, the ANO would gain 24.5 per cent of votes. Interestingly, the second, minor member of the government coalition Social Democratic Party would fail with 4 per cent, thus getting no seat in the lower chamber of the Parliament. Such results were indicated by multiple surveys conducted in the course of the last months.<sup>2</sup> A characteristic feature of this year's pre-election campaign is the formation of coalitions. One of them has a chance to win – that consisting of the Pirates (PP) and the Mayors and Independents (STAN), which obtained 27.5 per cent in the recent public poll. The second one, comprising the centrist Civic Democratic Party (ODS), Christian Democratic Party (KDU-ČSL) and TOP 09, still lags oscillating around 17 per cent. Two other subjects usually enjoy support higher than 5 per cent, specifically the populist Freedom and Direct Democracy movement (SPD) and the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (KSČM). In terms of the so-called election potential, in addition, parliamentary seats could be realistically gained also by Social Democrats and the conservative Tricolour movement.

	<b>PP+ STAN</b>	<b>ANO</b>	<b>ODS+KDU- ČSL+TOP09</b>	<b>SPD</b>	<b>KSČM</b>	<b>ČSSD</b>
<i>Kantar CZ (in %)</i>	34.0	22.0	17.5	11.0	5.5	4.5
<i>Median (in %)</i>	27.5	24.5	17.5	10.0	7.5	4.0
<i>Potential (in %)</i>	32.5	28.5	23.0	14.5	9.0	8.5

*Table 1: Comparison of election preferences (including election potential calculated by Median) presented by the two respected agencies in March Source: Median; Kantar CZ*

<sup>1</sup> For greater detail see a summary of the survey: *Sněmovní volební model* (2021, March). Retrieved April 01, 2021 from [https://www.median.eu/cs/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Volby\\_2021\\_03\\_v03MK.pdf](https://www.median.eu/cs/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Volby_2021_03_v03MK.pdf) (in Czech).

<sup>2</sup> Compare with an enquiry conducted by the Kantar CZ agency within their long-term research dedicated to political preferences: *Trendy Česka 21* (2021, March). Retrieved April 01, 2021 from [https://ct24.ceskatelevize.cz/sites/default/files/2543796-trendy\\_ceska\\_2021\\_vlna\\_67\\_model.pdf](https://ct24.ceskatelevize.cz/sites/default/files/2543796-trendy_ceska_2021_vlna_67_model.pdf) (in Czech).

## Scepticism and dissatisfaction

This shift of the political preferences and public support in relation to individual subjects corresponds with an increasing scepticism towards the current political representation and overall future development. Whereas the level of satisfaction with the present political situation fluctuated around 30 per cent for a long period in the last decade, the coronavirus pandemic brought about a turn. In spring 2020, the support for the Government and satisfaction with the domestic political situation soared to more than 60 per cent, which was unprecedented, the next months were typical of a gradual decrease and return to the „normal“ levels. The second, autumn wave of the disease had an opposite impact in comparison with the first one in the spring. The ongoing restrictions, re-introduced state of emergency, which was still in force by the end of March, questionable compensatory state policies, chaotic vaccination and a wide array of missteps committed by the highest authorities strengthened the declining tendency. In February, the people's satisfaction plunged to mere 11 per cent, the historically lowest level.

These figures coincide with the March Eurostat Report focusing on actual moods among consumers and businessmen with regard to future prospects.<sup>3</sup> The analysis revealed that the Czechs were the most sceptic nation of the European Union as far as the pandemic development is concerned. Whereas the value of 100 points implies a balance between optimism and scepticism, the Czech Republic dropped to 83.3 points, being accompanied by adjacent Slovakia and Cyprus. Interestingly, economic sentiment got better in the case of 25 out of 27 member states in February, the exceptions being posed only by the Czech Republic and Estonia where. Not by coincidence, state authorities of these two countries have introduced the most severe forms of lockdown so far. From the survey follows that deeper dissatisfaction with the political situation and scepticism in relation to future development are typical of the post-communist states of the CEE region. It might be connected primarily not with the overall economic situation but with a complex and ambiguous relationship between state institutions and citizens. Legal consciousness is frequently permeated by mistrust of the institutions that emerged after the fall of socialism in the late 1980s. The political class, as well as state institutions, are still perceived as hostile and repressive entities, lacking positive, constructive and servant role in society. Mismanagement of the Czech authorities observed over the last year must have inevitably led to an increasing level of civil disobedience and emergence of „shadow“ areas that exist implicitly and where the state restrictions are not abided by. Naturally,

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<sup>3</sup> Holub, P. (2021, March 31), *Česko se stává polem špatné nálady. Je nejpesimističtější v Evropské unii*. Retrieved April 01, 2021 from <https://www.seznamzpravy.cz/clanek/cesko-se-stava-polem-spatne-nalady-je-nejpesimistictější-v-evropske-unii-149024> (in Czech).

such development has found expression in the political preferences and rearrangement of political actors.

### **Conservatives to react**

Besides the rise of the Pirates as a new, „unorthodox“, big-tent progressive movement, accompanied by the decline of the ANO and Social Democrats, there are forces representing the most dissatisfied part of society which turns down the restrictive regime damaging the national economy as an unacceptable suppression of freedom and civil rights. In principle, it is a conservative reaction to the dominant paradigm. At the beginning of March, three minor parties – Tricolour, Free Citizens' Party and Freeholder Party – agreed on cooperation in the autumn election. In the joint declaration, they emphasise the values of freedom, the free market economy, national interests, representative democracy while warning against left-liberal progressivism embodied by the Pirates. If running together, they can succeed, exceeding the threshold of 5 per cent.

Similarly, former President Václav Klaus, in response to the citizens' strong demand, started to call for the establishment of a new political subject challenging the radical progressivists and putting an end to the impotence of the current coalition. Face to face with the present situation, however, such a step would not likely to break through. Standing as a candidate for the Tricolour seems more probable, especially after the chairman and the President's son Václav Klaus junior resigned and left politics unexpectedly in the second half of March. Several days before, ex-President Klaus published a declaration whereby he expressed concerns as for the post-election situation, blamed the Government for the economic and social breakup, appealed for a return to civil and economic freedoms as a prerequisite of normal life and prosperity, and called upon representatives of the Freedom and Direct Democracy (SPD), Tricolour and other like-minded actors to cooperate.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, such an appeal will likely not to be answered as proven by the SPD chairman Tomio Okamura's reaction that the only way is to support his movement. This rivalry and competition can do harm the conservative opposition and result in an election unsuccess.

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<sup>4</sup> Klaus, V. (2021, March 20), *Chceme zase normálně žít*. Retrieved April 02, 2021 from <https://www.institutvk.cz/clanky/1716.html> (in Czech).

## **Conclusion**

The mismanagement, absence of vision and strategy, inability to justify government policies as well as long-term restrictions damaging national economy, health, moral and last but not least work ethic of a substantial part of the Czech society have led to growing dissatisfaction with the political situation and state authorities, and to more frequent manifestations of civil disobedience. In terms of political preferences, these factors have resulted in a considerable weakening of the former hegemon (ANO), a rise of the progressivist New Left (Pirate Party) and an increase of conservative reaction. It will likely to redraw the Czech political map after the October parliamentary election.