

## **ELECTION BRIEFING NO 57 THE ABSENCE OF EUROPE IN THE CZECH PARLIAMENTARY ELECTION, MAY 28-29 2010**

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### **Key points:**

- At 62.6%, election turnout was significantly lower than the 1990s average but only slightly lower than the 2006 elections.
- European issues were completely absent in the campaign and the level of Europeanisation within Czech party competition is negligible.
- Both major poles of the Czech party system declined dramatically: the right wing Civic Democratic Party as well as the left wing Czech Social Democratic Party.
- The Green party and Christian and Democratic Union-Czechoslovak Peoples' Party lost their parliamentary representation.
- Two new parties have gained parliamentary seats - Tradition-Responsibility-Prosperity 09 and Public Affairs - both of them right wing parties.
- The possibility of creating an ideologically coherent coalition (composed of right-wing parties) with a clear majority in the House of Deputies of the Czech Parliament emerged for the first time since 1996.

The outcome of the 2006 parliamentary elections prolonged the period of political stalemate between Czech left and the right-wing parties.<sup>1</sup> The Czech left, namely the Czech Social Democratic Party (ČSSD) and Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (KSČM), won 100 seats. Right-wing and centrist parties - namely the Civic Democratic Party (ODS), Christian and Democratic Union-Czechoslovak Peoples' Party (KDU-ČSL) and the Green Party (SZ) - also won 100 seats. This situation only exacerbated the fragility of governance and the impossibility of reaching a clear governing majority; a condition reproduced in Czech politics a number of times since the 1990s. Two main consequences have followed from this. First, the period of negotiations before a cabinet with parliamentary support could be formed took a very long time. Mirek Topolánek's coalition of the Civic Democratic Party, Christian and

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<sup>1</sup> See: Seán Hanley, 'Europe and the Czech Parliamentary Elections of 2-3 June 2006', *European Parties Elections and Referendums Network Election Briefing No 27* at [http://www.sussex.ac.uk/sei/documents/epern\\_no\\_27.pdf](http://www.sussex.ac.uk/sei/documents/epern_no_27.pdf).

Democratic Union, and the Greens was confirmed by the Lower House in January 2007, more than seven months after the elections. Moreover, the cabinet was given a vote of confidence by the House of Deputies only as a result of the votes of two 'dissident' deputies who left the Social Democratic faction.

Second, and even more problematic from the point of view of governmental stability, the consequence was a general fragility of parliamentary clubs which were affected by defections of individual deputies during the 2006-10 parliament. By the end of its term, fourteen deputies were non-aligned. Both governing parties (four Civic Democrats left as did two Greens and four Christian Democrats) and the opposition (four Social Democrats) lost deputies. For the Green Party, the schism among their deputies marked confirmation of deep internal feuds between the party leadership, symbolised by party chair Martin Bursík, and the more radical platform critical of the party elite and the party's participation in the centre-right coalition. The situation culminated in spring 2009 when the most outspoken critics were excluded from the party and again in June 2009 when Mr Bursík was replaced as party leader by the 'compromise' candidate Ondřej Liška. This long-term intra-party feud undermined public support for the Greens.

The position of Mr Topolánek's government was subject to continual weakening during the lifetime of the last parliament. As a result, the position of the strongest coalition party, the Civic Democrats, declined in the October 2008 regional and Senate elections. The Civic Democrats obtained only 23.6% of the vote in the regional elections, while its major rival the Social Democrats triumphed with 35.9%. In the Senate, the Social Democrats were also on the rise, winning twenty-three of the twenty-seven contested seats. Mr Topolánek, however, maintained his position of party leader even after the electoral congress of the party. Internal disputes inside the Civic Democratic Party were also revealed during the complicated Lisbon Treaty ratification process in the Czech Republic. The process took two years but, in the end, even the most prominent and outspoken opponent of the Lisbon Treaty, President Václav Klaus, signed the document on November 3 2009.<sup>2</sup>

The Czech Presidency of the Council of the European Union (EU) was the key activity in the first half-year of 2009 from the perspective of Czech membership of the EU. The presidency was *a priori* deemed (or even doomed) to be weak and problematic; especially by France, the preceding presidential country. Besides pointing to the unstable domestic political situation, the Czech political elite's Eurosceptic orientation was raised. This was true in the case of President Klaus, but a false perception of the orientation and performance of Mr Topolánek's cabinet. Both the minister of foreign affairs Karel Schwarzenberg and deputy prime minister for European affairs Alexandr Vondra guaranteed a stable pro-European course for Czech foreign policy. From an administrative perspective, the Czech Presidency was also well prepared. The Czech Presidency's basic agenda was expressed in the slogan 'Europe without Barriers' with its main priorities summed up in the '3E' agenda: economy, energy, and Europe in the World. At home, Mr Topolánek's leadership of the Czech Presidency was assessed fairly positively despite the extremely complicated international situation at the beginning of 2009 (the conflict in Gaza, interruption of Russian gas supply via Ukraine, global economic crisis). The prime minister's positive media image increased as did that of the Civic Democratic Party. However, this trend occurred at the same as the government was no longer

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<sup>2</sup> For details about the 2006-2009 period see: Vít Hloušek and Petr Kaniok, 'The 2009 European Parliament Elections in the Czech Republic, June 5-6, 2009', *European Parties Elections and Referendums Network European Parliamentary Election Briefing No. 29* at [http://www.sussex.ac.uk/sei/documents/no\\_29\\_epernep2009czechrep.pdf](http://www.sussex.ac.uk/sei/documents/no_29_epernep2009czechrep.pdf).

able to control a parliamentary majority in the Lower House and with the opposition, led by Social Democrat chair Jiří Paroubek, systematically striving for the recall of the cabinet. Votes of no-confidence took place several times, both Social Democrats and Communists constantly expressed dissatisfaction with the government together with several independent deputies, but the necessary majority of 101 votes was difficult to achieve. Only the fifth attempt was successful. On March 24 2009, in the middle of the Czech Presidency of the EU Council, Mr Topolánek's government was ousted by the 101 votes of Social Democrats, Communists, two defecting deputies from the Civic Democratic Party and two 'dissenting' Greens.

The context was interesting, showing a clear focus on Czech domestic issues and conflicts, as well as an obvious ignorance of the broader European context. During the Slovenian Presidency of 2008, for six months all the parliamentary parties agreed to make a joint effort to manage the Presidency in an effective manner. In the Czech case, in the middle of Presidency, and driven solely by the logic of domestic politics, the ostensibly pro-European Social Democrats ignored the complications and damage to the country's image abroad that this move would cause and deposed the cabinet. This event symbolically confirmed the fact that the European agenda was hardly an important topic for Czech political parties. Only some of them (especially inside the Civic Democratic Party) produced European agenda controversies or ideological conflicts among members and party elite. As the June 2009 European Parliament (EP) election showed, European integration issues were, as the saying goes, only 'small beer' for the Czech voters as well, as far as their salience and implementation was concerned.

This impending governmental crisis was solved by a political agreement between the Social Democrats and the former ruling parties. According to the agreement, a new caretaker government was established, headed by former head of the Czech Statistical Office Jan Fischer. Nominations to ministerial posts were (co-)determined by the Civic Democrats, Social Democrats and Greens. These parties provided the designated prime minister and his cabinet with some programme and policy limits as well. The House of Deputies confirmed the cabinet on Sunday June 7 2009, the day after EP elections, with the cabinet confirmed by a clear majority of 156 deputies belonging to the Social Democratic, Civic Democratic, and Green clubs, plus part of the Christian Democratic faction. The majority of Christian Democrats and the entire Communist faction abstained from voting. Only non-affiliated deputy Miloš Melčák voted against the cabinet. Mr Fischer's cabinet was considered from the very beginning as an interim caretaker government with its mandate limited by the term of preliminary elections. Thanks to the convincing behaviour of the prime minister and the dismissive stance of a substantial part of the Czech public towards existing party elites, the cabinet quickly obtained very high credibility in Czech society. According to the Public Opinion Research Centre (CVVM), 72% of respondents trusted Mr Fischer's cabinet in April 2010. Exactly a year earlier, Mr Topolánek's cabinet was trusted by only 20% of respondents, whereas average trust in his government fluctuated around the 30% mark during the entire 2007-2009 period.

Political parties thus started to approach the issue of the preliminary elections. A general consensus emerged to use the same method as in 1998, namely passing a special constitutional law on the preliminary termination of the parliamentary period of the House of Deputies of the Parliament of Czech Republic. Another way prescribed by the constitution to dissolve the Lower House earlier was complicated, and would have taken a long time as Mr Fischer's government would have had to have connected the proposed law with the question

of trust in the government, with the House rejecting the proposal or abstaining for a period of three months.

Both the House of Deputies and the Senate accepted the special constitutional law on shortening the parliamentary period in May 2009 and the President signed it in June 2009. On the basis of this law, preliminary elections should have taken place at the beginning of October 2009, with the political parties preparing for the campaign accordingly. Non-aligned deputy Mr Melčák, however, criticised this act in the Czech Constitutional Court claiming that it was un-constitutional (thus making eligible to be reviewed by the Constitutional Court) and harmed his right to be elected, as he was elected for a four-year period. One interesting aspect of the affair was that Mr Melčák was defended in the Court by advocate Jan Kalvoda, a top former top politician, member of several governments and one-time chair of the Civic Democratic Alliance in the 1990s. The Constitutional Court decided on September 10 2009 that the law contradicted the Czech Constitution and *de facto* cancelled the preliminary elections.

Although some leading Czech politicians still wanted, even after the Court's decision, to hold early elections, the majority position was to wait for the regular elections due in spring 2010. The final nail in the coffin of the early elections issue occurred when the Social Democrats decided not to support a new attempt to dissolve the House of Deputies. At the same time, Social Democratic leaders were prominent critics of the Constitutional Court's decision.

In the meantime, the country was governed by Mr Fischer's cabinet, which increasingly became the object of clashes between the Civic and Social Democrats. The Civic Democratic Party, for example, claimed that some of the cabinet members should be removed; the heaviest criticisms were directed at minister of the interior Martin Pecina. The Social Democrats - together with Communists, Christian Democrats and some non-affiliated MPs - complicated the approval procedure for the 2010 state budget and cut its restrictive measures - named, after the popular minister of finance Eduard Janota, 'Janota's Package' - by a substantial amount.

According to a Public Opinion Research Center poll from September 2009, slightly fewer than 30% of voters supported the Social Democrats and Civic Democrats. The Communists would also make it into the parliament with around 15% support, as well as the Christian Democrats with 6%. The Green Party hovered around the 5% electoral threshold; the poll showed their place was being challenged by two newcomers: 'Tradition-Responsibility-Prosperity 09' (which was known officially by its Czech acronym: TOP 09) and a party called Public Affairs (see below).

The initiator and political motor of Tradition-Responsibility-Prosperity 09 was Miroslav Kalousek, former chair of the Christian Democrats in 2003-2006, who left the Christian and Democratic Union in protest against the party leadership's, and especially party chair Cyril Svoboda's, swing to the political left. Mr Kalousek was quickly followed by other prominent and popular Christian Democrats (Vlasta Parkanová, Pavel Severa) and they founded the Tradition-Responsibility-Prosperity 09 party. The charismatic and highly popular Karel Schwarzenberg was elected as the chair and 'media face' of the party and the party positioned itself to the right of the Civic Democrats as a clearly conservative party voicing the necessity of making un-popular economic reforms. Tradition-Responsibility-Prosperity 09 negotiated

close cooperation with the 'Mayors and Independents' political movement (composed of local politicians) which attracted not only many former grassroots Christian Democrats but also popular local leaders and opinion formers.

The Public Affairs (VV) party was, strictly speaking, not a new party. It was already established in 2001; however it remained anchored in local Prague political circles for many years. The party first caught on nationwide during the summer 2009 EP election campaign, obtaining 2.4% of the vote. For the election campaign, before the cancelled preliminary parliamentary elections, they chose the popular personality Radek John, a famous investigative journalist and writer working for many years at the popular private TV channel NOVA. The party's programme was a rather eclectic and populist combination of the principles and measures of direct democracy (many of the party's political priorities and steps were approved by referendums in which party members and registered sympathisers could vote). Rhetorical claims to fight the budgetary deficit were combined with a broad-minded social policy connected to more sophisticated scrutiny of the eligibility of people who obtained social allowances. Fighting corruption was presented as the crucial issue during the campaign both in 2009 and in 2010. As far as its programme was concerned, Public Affairs was situated on the centre-right of the Czech party spectrum. However, the party's political profile was rather unclear and its political style was strongly populist, employing many tools from the toolbox of protest parties (for example, the promise to 'whip out political dinosaurs' in the 2010 campaign). Moreover, at the same time it was not obvious what the exact role and impact was of the party's rich sponsors and private entrepreneurs. The contract signed between the party and new Public Affairs deputies was also problematic. According to the contract, the party could claim a penalty of up to three million Czech Crowns (roughly 275,000 thousands Euro) if a party deputy did not vote in line with its decisions or if they switched to another parliamentary club. It must be noted that there is no imperative mandate in the Czech constitution and the party's claims, therefore, obviously contradicted the Czech constitution.

The Czech party scene was influenced by two important affairs on the very cusp of the spring 2010 election campaign. The Green Party cancelled its support for Mr Fischer's cabinet on 23 April 2010. The official explanation for this was based on the alleged increase of Social Democratic influence on the cabinet and the increasing disregard for environmental issues. Minister for Human Rights and Minorities Michael Kocáb, who was nominated by the Greens, resigned from his office. An even more important affair was the resignation of Mirek Topolánek from the position of electoral leader and chair of the Civic Democratic Party. This decision had its own genesis. Mr Topolánek had already stepped back once before, in September 2009, when he resigned from the office of MP in response to the collapse of the plan for early elections. This step in fact harmed the position of Civic Democrats in the parliament. On April 1 2010 (incidentally 'All Fools' Day' in the Czech Republic) he was dismissed as an electoral leader after controversial statements expressed in an interview for the gay magazine *LUI*. And finally, he resigned from the post of party chair on April 13 after a very complicated debate inside the Civic Democratic Party leadership. Long-standing politician and party leader Petr Nečas was thus quickly selected as the new electoral leader and was, therefore, able to start the 'hot phase' of the election campaign that had already begun.

## Election Campaign

The remark made above about the beginning of the electoral campaign must be taken as a slight exaggeration. The Czech Republic had been in a permanent election campaign mode since the 2009 EP elections. This long-lasting campaign was connected to the originally planned (and later cancelled) early elections scheduled for autumn 2009.

The campaign itself was quite specific: in the absence of a 'political' government, which would naturally divide political parties between opposition and government, all of them behaved as if they were opposition parties. The rhetorical attacks against Mr Fischer's government were rather comical, as it was a fight against a non-existent opponent - prime minister Fischer had declared long before the elections that he was not interested in a future political career. The only members of his cabinet who articulated post-election political ambitions were some ministers nominated by the Social Democrats. For example, Interior Minister Martin Pecina stood as a Social Democratic leader in Prague. Paradoxically, it was the Social Democrats who criticized the government the most.

The basic theme of the campaign was the economic situation in the Czech Republic. Though the impact of the economic crisis was not as devastating as in the Baltic States, Czech dependence on exports logically transferred the EU's overall poor performance to domestic firms as well. Moreover, the Minister of Finance in Mr Fischer's government was Eduard Janota, a long-standing non-partisan deputy at the ministry who had been preparing state budgets for most governments since 1989. His image as a recognised and respected expert allowed the government to stress the unfortunate tendency of budgets deficits and effectively forced politicians to consider deficit spending as a serious theme and threat. The public perceived Mr Janota, and indeed the entire cabinet, as a guarantee of apolitical expertise. Periodic bad news - or, in better cases, sober data such as the evolution of government finances - was taken into account by the public more seriously than if it had come from the mouth of a political minister.

The dominant political parties, the Civic Democrats and the Social Democrats, built their campaigns on mutual antagonism. Following the tradition of the past few elections, these two parties' campaigns were dominated by negative definitions of their enemy, primarily through visual elements. Initially only the Civic Democrats and Social Democrats were the targets for negative campaigning, closely followed by Tradition-Responsibility-Prosperity 09. At the end of the pre-election period, negative campaigning (especially that conducted by the Social Democrats) also focused on the Public Affairs party. The Christian Democrats and Greens remained untouched, as they were probably considered as not interesting or worthy enough for this kind of attention.

The campaign confirmed the role of the new media, which already started to emerge during last year's EP election campaign. This time the social networking sites were not dominated by the 'eggs throwers',<sup>4</sup> but there were rather used as a communication tool for appeals, in many cases supported by popular artists, for the election of new parties and for 'change'. The most widely discussed event was a controversial video titled 'Persuade Granny' performed by well-known young actors Jiří Mádl and Martha Issová. Although the primary targets of these

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<sup>4</sup> See: Ibid..

appeals were the Communists and Social Democrats, criticisms were also directed at the Civic Democrats.

In substantive terms, the Civic Democratic Party focused on the term 'Solution' as their election manifesto bore the title 'Solutions that help'. The Civic Democrats also tried to portray their new leader Petr Nečas as the 'hope for a new politics'. Apart from 'new politics' their programme offered: the maintenance of the current tax burden, the strengthening of the functioning of the social security system and pension reform. The main priorities of the party were clearly in the economic field as the Civic Democrats focused on themes such as: managing the economic crisis, healthy public finances and increasing employment through flexible social policies. In addition to presenting themselves as a competent team of professionals, party leader Petr Nečas tried to get rid of its perceived image as one encompassing local business bosses ('godfathers') and the politicians serving their interests. A clear sign of such activity was the emergence of the 'competence team' presented by Mr Nečas early in May. The potential candidates for ministerial positions did not include any of the party's more controversial figures such as former ministers Ivan Langer or Petr Gandalovič.

Economic issues were also emphasized by the Social Democrats but, unlike the Civic Democrats, the socialists' rhetoric focused on more expenditure. Billboards with easily understandable slogans such as 'Thirteen pensions from the profits of CEZ', or 'Against charges for health care' flooded the entire country. According to preliminary estimates, the Social Democrats spent over 330 million Crowns (12.6 million Euros) on the campaign. The total amount that they spent during the year since the EP election campaign (including the canceled early election) could even have reached 700 million Crowns (30 million Euros). This heavy reliance on political marketing was illustrated by their mass media advertising activity - the Social Democrats produced 50% of all political adverts, thereby significantly outperforming the other parties. In addition to its emphasis on spending and maintaining social security, another leitmotif of the party's campaign was the health care system - a winning theme for the Social Democrats during the 2008 regional and Senate elections. However, during the campaign the party suffered from two unpleasant events. The first was the discovery of its very low popularity among young voters (the outcome of a project called 'Student Elections', which aimed to popularise elections among Czech high schools students). The second problem was a brief boycott of several newspapers. The 'Silence' campaign was initiated by party leader Jiří Paroubek, who wanted to express his displeasure over the perceived style of how the 'right-wing media' was writing both about him and the Social Democrats more generally.

The Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia, historically the third strongest party in modern Czech politics, relied on a traditional party campaign. The Communists did not try to offer new topics or a different style of politics. Under the slogan 'Labor and social security - the requirements that we will meet', the Communists lured voters to populist and unrealistic promises; for example, the gradual increase in the minimum wage to 14,000 Crowns (560 Euros) or the minimum pension to 10,000 Crowns (400 Euros) - the minimum wage in the Czech Republic in 2010 was about 8000 Crowns (320 Euros). The Communists mainly focused on social issues and promised to, for example, ensure the right of first employment or merit scholarships for University students.

The Christian Democratic Union-Czechoslovak People's Party's campaign failed to really register with voters. The Christian Democrats, led by new (and 'old') leader Cyril Svoboda, tried to focus on family politics. At the same time, it was Christian Democratic MPs who, at

the end of the electoral period, profiled themselves most in the context of support for women on maternity leave. The party failed to find another major theme; indeed, its vague and colourless campaign slogan 'The better in us' confirmed the quandary in which the Christian Democrats found themselves in recent years.

Tradition-Responsibility-Prosperity 09 delivered a very strong and dynamic campaign. The party, packed with former Christian Democrats, focused on appeals for radical structural economic reform and right-wing rhetoric, placing itself to the right of the Civic Democratic Party. The central message of its campaign was a vision of significant budget cuts, especially in the area of the mandatory part of the state budget. Conservative promises of 'sweat and tears' were sweetened by the statement that if the cuts and reforms were carried out quickly, their positive effects would be both substantial and swift.

The Greens, another part of the former Topolánek coalition, were almost invisible during the campaign. The party attracted most attraction in March, when it was supported by a number of important public figures, led by former president Vaclav Havel. It was on this occasion that Jan Ruml, a former Minister of the Interior and prominent politician in both the Civic Democratic Party and Freedom Union, became a party member. However, during the campaign itself most references to the Greens always arose in connection with the polls, indicating that party would remain outside the future Parliament.

At the same time, exactly the opposite message was sent out in the case of the Public Affairs party, the new 'bright comet' of Czech party politics. The party - known pejoratively as either the 'back up team' of the Civic Democrats in Prague or as 'the first company among Czech political parties' - benefited from the comprehensive anti-corruption rhetoric that was associated with the figure of party leader Radek John. The former TV journalist gained star status as the face of the investigative TV programme 'By my own eyeball' (whose reports often dealt with corruption and government malfunction). The party itself relied on a few superficial slogans and promises including the magical word 'change'. The party list was a mixture of municipal politicians and young unknown faces whose ideological profile was unclear.

The last party worth noting was the Party of Citizens' Rights-Zemanovci. However, the only tool of their campaign was party chairman Miloš Zeman. The former Social Democrat prime minister Democrats compiled his list from former members of his cabinet that ruled at the end of 1990s (even at that time, the vast majority of ministers were over 70 years of age!) as an alternative to the Social Democrats.

## **Results**

The election results were probably the biggest surprise in the history of Czech parliamentary elections. Although opinion polls up until the elections had indicated that the difference between the Social Democrats and Civic Democrats would not be dramatic, the basic questions posed were: how much the Social Democrats would win and would they be able to form a government? The other key question concerned the performance of the Christian Democrats, who had teetered on the 5% mark required for entry into the House. A minor issue was the possible gains for the new parties.

Initial estimates of the election results indicated that the sociologists' surveys and polls were wrong, and that voters voted very differently than they had stated. The major parties faced significantly decreases. As **Table 1** shows, the Social Democrats were far from the 35% result that they had hoped for and a large proportion of voters also left the Civic Democratic Party. On the other hand, Tradition-Responsibility-Prosperity 09 was underestimated; polls predicted that it would win around 10% of the vote. Predictions were rather more accurate in the case of the Communists, Public Affairs and the Christian Democrats. The number of votes won by the Party of Citizens' Rights-Zemanovci, the Sovereignty movement led by former MEP Jana Bobošíková, and the Greens – who, in the end, got only 2.44% of the vote in the end – were also more or less as expected.

**Table 1: Results of the 2010 Czech Parliamentary elections**

Party	%	Mandates	+/- Mandates
Social Democratic Party	22,09	56	-18
Civic Democratic Party	20,22	53	-28
Tradition-Responsibility-Prosperity 09	16,71	41	+41
Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia	11,27	26	0
Public Affairs	10,88	24	+24
Christian Democratic Union-Czechoslovak People's Party	4,39	0	-13
Party of Citizens' Rights-Zemanovci	4,33	0	
Sovereignty	3,67	0	
Others	6,44	0	-6

Source: [www.volby.cz](http://www.volby.cz)

The Social Democrat's win changed quickly into a bitter and legendary Pyrrhic victory. While at the end of the campaign Mr Paroubek declared that he expected a 'significant triumph', a few hours after the preliminary results became clearer, the visibly disappointed candidate for prime minister announced that he was leaving the post of party chairman. His resignation was the first of a series: on the election weekend Christian Democrat leader Cyril Svoboda, Green Party leader Ondřej Liška and Miloš Zeman, leader of Party of Citizens' Rights-Zemanovci, all stepped down. Before the results were finally counted, the leaders of the Civic Democrats, Tradition-Responsibility-Prosperity 09, and Public Affairs announced their intention to form a new coalition. A weak victory thus sentenced the Socialists to the role of figurines; if a cabinet consisting of the three right-wing and centre-right parties is formed, it will have a comfortable majority of 118 seats out of 200 in the House of Deputies.

The results were a severe defeat for the Civic Democrats. However, the loss of several hundred thousand voters was sweetened by the surprising fact that the party was came within shooting range of the winning Socialists. The Civic Democrats' results offered the party both participation in the new government and, moreover, the position of prime minister - an outcome that was unimaginable several weeks before the election. However, voters sent the party a clear signal. Several regional leaders or important party figures including Ivan Langer, leader of the party list in the Olomouc region, failed to get elected. The painful wound suffered by the Civic Democrats in their citadel of Prague – the place where even 'Mr. Klaus' tennis racket' could win elections - the party was defeated by the Tradition-Responsibility-Prosperity 09 list. Thus, in the context of the Civic Democrats, the only real winner of elections was Mr Nečas. The entrusted leader and possible prime minister announced a couple of days after the elections his intension to seek the post of chairman at the June party congress.

The Tradition-Responsibility-Prosperity 09 party, led by the duo of Karel Schwarzenberg and Miroslav Kalousek, can be considered the real winner of the election. The project, which started only a year before the elections, won more votes than expected. Although the excellent election result was downplayed by referring to the attractiveness of Mr Schwarzenberg, the voters apparently appreciated the presence of a number of successful local politicians and renowned experts in the party's ranks. Tradition-Responsibility-Prosperity 09 appeared to win support from disappointed Civic Democrat voters, and also succeeded among young voters.

The Communists' performance was rather traditional. Although demoted from the position of third strongest party, they were the only traditional party that held its ground in the Lower Chamber. Yet the results were disappointing for the Communists - according to pre-election polls the party had counted on being a part of leftist government or at least calculated that it would increase its influence. However, the Socialists' weak performance led to the opposite outcome.

In terms of election results, Public Affairs struggled with the Communists for fourth place. Though the Communists finally won by a few tenths of a percent, Public Affairs' electoral outcome was also a great achievement. Subsequently, it also created a big question. Voters frustrated by the traditional major parties sent to the Lower Chamber voted for an organisation whose ideological profile was unclear and character problematic. The party was funded by entrepreneurs with a controversial reputation. It will probably take a long time before the common perception of the party as 'the Company' will change. Another question arose concerning the implications for the party resulting from its possible involvement in government.

Both the Christian Democrats and Greens responded to the election results with changes in the party leadership. In both cases, electoral failure followed long lasting intra-party crises during the entire previous term. While the Christian Democrats lacked both clear themes and charismatic leaders, the Green Party suffered mainly from internal disputes and a split between party elites and its members and sympathisers.

## **(Non-)Importance of European Issues**

As already mentioned, issues connected with European integration were not an important topic in Czech politics, neither as a tool for political parties distinguishing themselves from one another nor as a tool for voter mobilisation. The Europeanisation of Czech parties, and particularly of the Czech party system, remains constantly low. These trends were confirmed again by the 2010 election campaign which concentrated completely on domestic issues with only vague references to the global economical crisis. The party electoral manifestos can be assessed in the same vein. The scope of European issues was even declining in comparison to the middle or beginning of the decade.

Of course, Czech political parties voiced their European positions in party manifestos but the extent to which they did so remained very limited; to call the approach of the major parties selective would be an under-statement. Looking to the left, the least space devoted to EU-related issues was given by the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia. Its manifesto contained remarks on the EU only in a chapter devoted to foreign policy which concentrated mainly on the party's negative stance towards NATO. The Communists only vaguely

addressed the question of ensuring equal rights for the position of small states within the EU. Interestingly, the Communists wanted to diversify Czech foreign trade to reduce the EU and the USA's share.

At the other pole, the Party of Citizens' Rights (SPO), founded in fall 2009 and led by former Social Democrat chair and prime minister Miloš Zeman, declared Czech participation in the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) a main priority. Mr Zeman's party manifesto also contained very traditional point of all the 'European' sections of Czech party programmes, namely a declaration to draw more extensively and effectively from EU structural fund money. But besides the two above-mentioned remarks, and a vague critique of the uneven position of the CAP towards new member countries' farmers, there was not a single paragraph or word devoted to European integration issues.

An effort to draw more from European funds was expressed in the Czech Social Democratic Party manifesto. This was, however, just a single point mentioning the Europeanisation of the party's sector policy preferences. Furthermore, the Social Democrats wanted to prepare the Czech economy for Euro currency adoption by 2015-2016 and criticised the current operation of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). Typical for Czech conditions, the position of the party towards European integration was mentioned in the section devoted to foreign policy. Here we could find only vague demands for more Czech influence on European politics, the same vague declaration of support for European integration and the argument that the EU should expand its influence the management of global issues via fostering the European External Action Service and the CFSP.

Neither did the right-wing parties demonstrate more notable signs of Europeanisation in their manifestos. Public Affairs mentioned the EU in sector policies only in regard to the possibility of drawing from structural funds and in relation to criticising the CAP. Political priorities relating to the EU were typically discussed in the section devoted to foreign policy; Public Affairs only considered economic questions calling for further liberalisation of the EU market. They saw securing worldwide trade liberalisation and EU member nation energy security as global tasks for the EU. The details of how this was to be achieved were, however, missing. The party also rejected Turkey entering the EU.

The Civic Democratic Party very often compared the Czech Republic to other EU members in their election manifesto in order to show the positive impacts of Mr Topolánek's cabinet. The Civic Democrats supported non-expansion of the EU budget for the 2014-2020 period and rejected further bureaucratisation of the EU. The European context of Czech policies was at least partially taken into account in the spheres of energy, agriculture, ecology, and security policy. The Civic Democrats' stance towards the EU was again summed up in the foreign policy section. The party retained its reserved or slightly negative views as far as deepening integration was concerned. On the other hand, the Civic Democrats supported further EU enlargement.

At the other extreme, the federalist view was expressed by the Christian and Democratic Union. In terms of precise examples of connecting domestic and European politics and economics, even the Christian Democrats mainly mentioned structural funds and the necessity of using them. Simplifying a bit, we can claim that on the question of the EU's future, the Christian Democrats had exactly the opposite stance to the Civic Democrats: yes to deeper integration; no to further territorial expansion of the EU (with Turkey explicitly excluded). Compared to previous years, the Christian Democratic manifesto was in fact de-Europeanised.

Only the electoral manifesto of the Green Party could actually be labeled as 'Europeanised', in the sense of a real connection between domestic and EU political perspectives and the solutions offered.

## **Conclusions and Prospects of Further Development**

How might one interpret the outcomes of the 2010 Czech parliamentary election? At first glance it may appear that the Czech party system experienced fairly turbulent changes after a long period of stability. Two former parliamentary parties lost their relevance and were replaced by organisations that entered the national arena of party competition only a year before. Both the Civic and Social Democrats lost heavily, ending with their worst results since the early 1990s. Many matadors of Czech politics lost their parliamentary seats and political influence as a consequence of the elections. So, initially, it appears that voters listened to the plea of many commentators and critics of the last decade of Czech politics. This plea was based on a certain weariness with the existing political elites and efforts to change Czech politics in a radical way in terms of both its personal composition as well as programmatic innovation. It is symptomatic, however, that none of the demanded changes were driven by (or at least accompanied by) the Europeanisation of Czech political parties and electoral campaigns. European issues played only a marginal role, if any.

Perceptive observers of Czech politics must nevertheless also mention deep signs of continuity. The left-right division was fully confirmed as the dominant party cleavage. A certain element of equilibrium between left and right was also maintained. To illustrate this point, we can count the electoral results of Civic Democratic Party and Tradition-Responsibility-Prosperity 09, parties that were neighbours on the left-right ideological scale, and compare them with the electoral outcome of the Civic Democrats in 2006. Another traditional feature of Czech party politics was also confirmed, namely that there was a space for smaller parties in addition to the two main poles, although the destiny of Christian and Democratic Union and the Greens (as well as the liberal Union of Freedom or the conservative Civic Democratic Alliance in earlier stages of party development) show that smaller centre-right and right wing parties were always in a complicated and fragile position. The stable position of the Communists was also a permanent feature of the Czech party system, as well as the fact that they could have real influence only in the case of a left-wing majority in the House of Deputies. The main innovation of the 2010 elections was thus the rapid electoral breakthrough of the centre-right Public Affairs party and their strong populist message and protest appeal. This protest appeal was, however, connected with an unclear programme and political position; the question remained if this combination could be maintained in the near future. The perspective that Public Affairs would enter government coalition with the Civic Democratic Party and Tradition-Responsibility-Prosperity 09 was the most likely scenario. But to take part in government would almost inevitably mean that this party's protest potential would decrease, forcing them to clarify their programme.

All in all, the Czech Republic can now expect an interesting – and, from the perspective of governmental stability and efficiency, positive – possibility of creating a strong and coherent coalition government. From this point of view, the 2010 Czech elections could be a positive milestone on the way to breaking some problematic features of Czech moderate pluralism, namely the chronic re-production of electoral stalemates between left and right, and the consequent structural political weakness of Czech cabinets. The first symbolic was made on August 10 2010 when a cabinet chaired by Petr Nečas obtained a parliamentary vote of

confidence with 118 (out of 200) deputies from the Civic Democratic Party, Tradition-Responsibility-Prosperity 09 and Public Affairs voting in favour.

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