

2004 EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT ELECTION BRIEFING NO 9 THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT ELECTION IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC JUNE 11-12 2004

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Key Points:

- Approximately 28% of eligible Czech voters took part in the first European elections. This was historically the lowest turnout in comparison to any national (lower chamber) parliamentary elections since 1989.
- Except for the presence of some extravagant candidates, the campaign failed to attract wider public attention and interest. It did not actually focus on providing information about the institution of the European Parliament, which could have been useful before the first ever such elections in this country.
- European issues were also absent during debates in the pre-election period. This was partly compensated for by the print and especially electronic media. Instead it was the business community that clearly incorporated the context of EU accession (and to a lesser extent the EP elections) into their promotional slogans.
- The elections were dominated by the victory of both opposition parties that are considered Eurosceptical. The winning conservative Civic Democratic Party received 30.04% of the votes and the Communist Party of the Czech Lands and Moravia obtained 20.26%. This result was, however, not a vote against Europe but rather against the incumbent government.
- Even though the results chiefly reflected voters' concerns about current politics, the supporters of European integration expressed their dissatisfaction with the government by supporting extra-parliamentary pro-European parties, such as the coalition of the Association of the Independent Candidates—the European Democrats who performed unexpectedly well (11.02%).
- Despite the little attention that the elections received, they turned out to be decisive in respect to later developments on the political scene. After the damaging result of the senior government coalition partner, the Czech Social Democratic Party (8.78%), Prime Minister Špidla decided to resign together with his cabinet.

Background

The June EP elections in the Czech Republic took place at a time of deteriorating public support for Vladimír Špidla's government.¹ The decrease in public support has been gradual since Špidla overtook the leadership of the Social Democratic Party and became prime minister in 2002. The major source of the incumbent cabinet's unpopularity is its inability to govern effectively. The government, which is comprised of the Social Democrats (CSSD), the Christian Democrats (KDU-CSL) and the Union of Freedom (US)², did not manage to implement many of its objectives from the coalition agreement, including the main reforms of the pension system, health care and education. Špidla has been perceived as both a weak prime minister and party leader, which can be ascribed to the complicated situation inside the Social Democratic Party itself. The existence of factions inside the CSSD is due to the significant influence which the former chairman and founder of the post-1989 party, Miloš Zeman, managed to maintain despite his official retirement announcement and move to his weekend house in Eastern Bohemia. The first conflict that emerged in public took place during the Presidential elections in spring 2003. The CSSD was unable to nominate a candidate who would be unanimously supported by the entire party and its coalition partners. In the event they were only able to choose their second choice candidate to fight the contest with Václav Klaus, the then chairman of the strongest opposition party, the Civic Democratic Party. Perhaps the only candidate who was able to compete with Klaus was paradoxically Zeman, but at that time Špidla opposed such a nomination. Instead, Špidla proposed Jan Sokol, a politically independent University professor. As a result of the lack of co-ordination among CSSD members and between coalition partners, Klaus won the presidential election despite the nominal prevalence of the governmental coalition in the parliament.

Another recent example of tensions inside the CSSD, and even more between individual coalition partners, was connected to the nomination of the Czech EU Commissioner in February 2004. After long disputes, Prime Minister Špidla nominated Miloš Kužvart for the historic position of the first Czech EU commissioner. Kužvart, the former environment minister, was considered a compromise nominee in place of the widely tipped Pavel Telicka, the Czech Republic's chief negotiator during the EU accession negotiations. However, Telicka was rejected by the Christian Democrats due to his communist past. Nonetheless, shortly after arriving in Brussels Kužvart resigned from the post, officially communicating that he was not sufficiently supported by all the coalition parties. Unofficially, Kužvart lacked substantial preparation and competencies for holding the position. Eventually, Kužvart was replaced by Telicka. This unfortunate debut in European politics brought international shame upon both the country and its government for which Prime Minister Špidla was felt to bear responsibility.

In addition, the insecure position of the government was underlined by the existential crisis of the junior coalition partner, the Union of Freedom. According to recent public opinion polls, this party might have even problems being re-elected to parliament. As we will see below, the Union of Freedom did not obtain seats in the European Parliament which is a real tragedy for a party that grounded its political image on promoting European integration. The party's major problem was its inability to communicate with its citizens. Also, the personal ambitions of individual party members which brought up some discrepancy in the mind of the party contributed to a decrease in its

¹ See: S. Hanley, "Europe and the Czech Parliamentary Elections of June 2002", *Opposing Europe Research Network/Royal Institute for International Affairs Election Briefing No 5*, Sussex European Institute, University of Sussex, 2002 at <http://www.sussex.ac.uk/sei/documents/paper5czech.pdf>.

² The Christian Democrats and the Union of Freedom ran together in a coalition for the national parliamentary elections in 2002.

popularity. In this fragile political situation, the Civic Democratic Party (ODS), ready to overtake the government, encouraged the Czech electorate to use the EP election contest as an active vote against the continuation of the current political arrangement.

Given the fact that the June elections were historically the first EP election in the Czech Republic, several political entrepreneurs used it as a good opportunity to enter the Czech political space. However, the names of the fourteen newly registered entities suggest that only four of them were mobilised by the European theme. These were: the National Coalition, “In the Name of the Interests of Moravia in United Europe”, The Party of Citizens of the Czech Republic, and the Czech Crown. Overall, thirty-two political parties, movements and coalitions applied to register their lists of candidates. The Central Election Committee rejected one of them. Some parties represented a rather trivial approach to politics (i.e. Helax - Ostrava city enjoys itself). In fact only eight parties had a serious chance of obtaining seats in the European Parliament: the Civic Democratic Party (ODS), the Communist Party of the Czech Lands and Moravia (KSCM), the Czech Social Democratic Party (CSSD), the Christian Democratic Union – the Czech People’s Party (KDU-CSL), the Union of Freedom (US), the Green Party (SZ), the Independents, and the Association of Independent Candidates-European Democrats (SNK-ED). It can be speculated that the EP electoral law might have motivated some marginal political parties to register themselves in order to run for the EP. However, they did this not so much for the sake of gaining mandates, which was an unrealistic expectation in their case, but rather to obtain financial compensation that was guaranteed to all parties obtaining more than 1% of the votes. The expected low turnout made the 1% target a realistic one.

Due to overall societal dissatisfaction with politics, during the EP campaign numerous new political entities followed the practice of the early 1990s when political bodies tried to distance themselves from established politics by avoiding the word ‘party’ in their names. Instead, they called themselves ‘union’, ‘association’, ‘initiative’, ‘block’, ‘movement’, ‘alliance’, ‘coalition’, etc. In the EP contest up to five groupings even attempted to emphasise their distance from the current establishment by calling themselves ‘independent’ or ‘non-partisans’. This strategy of attracting voters’ attention by stressing independence from the current political establishment proved to be an effective method during regional elections in the last couple of years. The popularity among parties to use the label ‘independent’ even raised a dispute between two candidates for EP candidate lists who wanted the same name during registration.

The electoral law that established the way of electing the MEPs from the Czech Republic was passed in March 2003. 24 Czech MEPs were to be elected from a single nation-wide list of candidates, which was entirely new to Czech electoral practice. No doubt such an arrangement was aimed at creating a feeling of truly national representation in the European Parliament. The candidate lists, which could include up to 32 names, could be submitted by any registered political party, movement or coalition of parties or movements. Such an agreement did not really take into account citizens’ initiatives. The law established a low registration fee of 15,000 Czech crowns, which eventually encouraged some marginal parties to run. The threshold to qualify for mandate distribution was set at 5% for all political groupings (both individual parties as well as coalitions). Similarly, to the national parliamentary elections, the system of proportional representation was used to elect MEPs. Mandates were to be distributed to individual political groupings who passed the 5% threshold according to the classical d’Hondt method of vote distribution. The fact that coalitions were not required to achieve a higher threshold encouraged many parties to join forces in a coalition. However, in case of the Union of Freedom this strategy turned out to be counter-productive and the Union became lost in the wider coalition Union of Free Democrats, which was comprised of the

Union of Freedom-Democratic Union, the Civic Democratic Alliance, the Path of Change and the Liberal Reform Party.

The Campaign

Overall the EP election campaign was poorly organized and there was a lack of information about the European Parliament. The parties claimed from the very beginning that they would devote less money to this campaign in comparison to the national parliamentary elections. This immediately gives the impression that the EP elections were of secondary importance. The information gap in the campaign was partly filled by the media, especially the electronic media. Each of the main dailies had its own EP (or EU) section on its main website. Information focused on voting rules, candidates' presentation, public opinion polls, etc. Still, the media mainly discussed the experience of the first weeks of EU membership, that is: changes in prices, the accessibility of European labour markets, and travel arrangements were extensively discussed. Considerably less space was devoted to presenting the European Parliament, its history, roles, competencies, etc. Newspapers also dedicated sections to interviews with candidates. Most of these interviews only confirmed the generally observed phenomenon of the EP elections as a means of further domestic political contestation. Interestingly enough, the most widely read daily *Mladá fronta Dnes*, excluded the Communists from their presentations of the most serious parties considered to have a chance to enter the European Parliament³.

The single nation-wide list of candidates had an impact on a campaign conducted differently from previous ones, with well-known personalities appearing to play a more important role than effective activists from particular regions in increasing a party's chances of being elected. Popular personalities from the top of the lists of candidates may also have assist more marginal (less known or influential) political groupings entering the European Parliament. The nomination of the former director of popular private station TV NOVA Vladimír Železný and the well-known journalist Jana Bobošíková (both from The Independents) or the former minister of foreign affairs Jozef Zieleniec (SNK-ED) greatly assisted their parties efforts to enter the European Parliament. The tactic of appointing famous and respected people was, however, used more often. Bearing in mind popular dissatisfaction with politics, many candidate list personalities came from other areas of social and cultural life, such as sport or the arts. For example, the Communists ranked an astronaut Vladimír Remek second on their list, and the Independents further counted on the popularity of ice-hockey goalkeeper Roman Málek. The Balbín Poetic Party was led by a famous singer Jaroslav Hutka.

Some other nominations of well-know persons were somewhat controversial. A former pornography star Dolly Buster (real name Nora Baumbergerová) certainly contributed to attracting interest in the otherwise dull campaign both in the Czech Republic and abroad⁴. Another sensation could be found to the controversial registration of Viktor Kožený's party. Kožený was the founder of Harvard Funds through which he 'tunnelled' billions of Czech crowns during voucher privatisation out of the country. Kožený, who is currently being prosecuted in the Czech Republic, has obtained Irish citizenship and used his European citizenship rights to compete for an MEP mandate through his own party "Viktor Kožený - Civic Federal Democracy". Kožený was, understandably, the only candidate who did not appear in the Czech Republic during the entire campaign. It is surprising that the governmental CSSD failed to follow the same pattern and place a charismatic personality at the top

³ KSCM is still officially ignored by many in respect to its discredited totalitarian past.

⁴ Much of the European media covered the election campaign activities of Dolly Buster. An extensive documentary report was also broadcast outside the EU, for example in the Russian television channel RTR Planeta. Normally, Czech politics hardly ever attracts attention of the Russian media.

of its candidate list, its EP election leader, Libor Roucek, was very dull. Taking into account some polls indicating that people valued mainly the good self-performance and character of the MEP candidates⁵, it can be argued that the CSSD might have lost some votes also due to its rather weak media presentation.

For the first time ever the Czech voters could find foreigners on the lists of candidates. Four candidates with foreign citizenship were nominated (including Czech national Viktor Kožený with Irish citizenship). Two of the foreign nationals were located on the list of independent candidates (SNK-ED and Association of Non-Partymen). One stood for the monarchist party, Czech Crown. However, neither of them had a real chance of being elected.

Non-European and mainly domestic issues prevailed in the election campaign. For the Civic Democratic Party it was important to focus on the EP elections as a test vote before potential early parliamentary elections. Similarly, during numerous interviews the leader of the European Democrats, Zieleniec, was mainly asked about the chances of whether he might occupy the political space which was previously occupied by the Union of Freedom. Some parties chose alternative topics. The Independent Initiative, represented by Buster, selected registered partnership of same sex couples as one of their leading projects in the campaign. The Communists appealed for the withdrawal from NATO and used the EP elections as another opportunity for faithful voters to affiliate themselves with the party which was clearly reflected in the slogan: “With you and for you, at home as well as in the EU” (where the front star of the EU symbol has a red colour).

Despite the prevalence of domestically inspired rhetoric in the campaign, the majority of political parties did prepare European election documents. The main slogans in the campaign, which hardly penetrated into the broader campaign discourse, touched upon national interests and the relationship between the Czech Republic and the European Union. For instance, the Civic Democratic Party and the Communists accentuated the struggle for equality between individual member states in the EU. They argued for an improvement of the peripheral position of new members, including their discrimination in the area of Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) or access to labour markets. The ODS called for equal chances for all citizens of the European Union. Overall political parties greatly emphasised what they would attempt to acquire for Czech citizens, not for the whole of Europe. Almost every party presented what it intends to promote in the EP. These catch phrases sounded very simplistic given that the 24 Czech MEPs will have little say in European decision-making. Only KDU-CSL tried to solve this by stressing its close link to and actual membership of the European People’s Party. But even with their European-sounding logo “The People’s Party will implement the most,” Christian Democrats did not refrain from focusing on national interests.

Results

As in several other European countries, the Czech voters also used the EP election to express dissatisfaction with the current government. Both parties from the parliamentary opposition emerged victorious. The winning conservative Civic Democratic Party received 30.04% of the votes and the Communist Party of the Czech Lands and Moravia obtained 20.26%. Both the ODS and the KSCM are considered Eurosceptical. The ODS has represented Soft Euroscepticism since the time

⁵ One survey revealed that 44% of the respondents who considered participating in the EP elections declared that both the character of a candidate and the nominating party mattered in their choice. 33% of respondents opted for a candidate’s character and 23 % the nominating party, as the most important criterion in their selection. See: STEM. Volby do Evropského parlamentu 2004 (<http://www.stem.cz/index.php>).

when Klaus, the incumbent president of the Czech Republic, was still its unquestioned leader and ideological constructor. The party chiefly criticised the EU's paternalist economic politics and opposed moves towards the federalisation of the EU. The argumentation of the ODS regarding the European Union has developed over the years and it was summarised in the party's documents. One of the main records is "Manifesto of Czech Eurorealism" prepared by the ODS's European issues team led by Jan Zahradil, who topped the ODS's EP election candidate list. It is a fact that ODS members are somewhat divided in respect to European integration. While its leadership, including the new chairman Mirek Topolánek and Zahradil, support a strongly Eurosceptical position, there is also a significant wing of more moderate opinions, represented for example by the newly elected MEP Jaroslav Zverina. As a matter of fact, the ODS profits from providing such a spectrum of views, which corresponds to its character and ambition of being a catch-all party. The ODS has never actually crossed the dangerous frontier of turning anti-European. Even if it was closest to the hearts of many ODS members, it would isolate the party from mainstream politics. It should also not be forgotten that ODS voters have always belonged to the firmest defenders of EU accession. An anti-European program would, therefore, be counterproductive for the party in respect to vote maximisation.

The KSCM never tried to conceal its hesitations regarding EU accession. Such an attitude perfectly matches the moods of most of the party's supporters. Older people who are nostalgic about communist times tend to favour the KSCM. In compliance with this, the KSCM was the only parliamentary political party on the Czech political scene that openly opposed EU accession before the referendum in June 2003.⁶ Despite being anti-European, the Communists have accommodated its interests in the new post-accession reality and stood to contest for MEP posts. In its EP election campaign, it stated "the KSCM considers the EU accession conditions of the Czech Republic as disadvantageous. Still, in respect to the EP elections the party grounds itself in the real situation that occurred after the accession referendum in 2003."

The fact that two major Eurosceptical parties won the EP elections, however, does not imply a growth in dissatisfaction with EU membership. Admittedly, a certain disillusion with EU membership has occurred and was mostly caused by the rise in prices and fact that most 'old' member states closed their labour markets to the newcomers. Over two thirds (67%) of the Czechs fear a deterioration in their household's economic situation after the EU accession.⁷ The feeling of inferior membership also inspires frustration. Nonetheless, the publicly felt disillusion is not reflected in people's views on the appropriateness of their country's EU membership. In addition, the nominal results of the ODS and the KSCM in the EP elections remain close to the long-term public opinion polls on party support. No increase in Euroscepticism or anti-Europeanism has, therefore, been registered and no anti-European party emerged before the EP elections that would attempt to capitalise on the potential disappointment with Europe.

The governmental coalition parties registered mixed results. The only governing party that can be rather satisfied with its EP election performance is the Christian Democratic Party, as it obtained a better result in comparison to any public opinion polls. In the last parliamentary elections the Christian Democrats obtained 4.7 % of votes more than in 2004 but at that time they ran in coalition with the Union of Freedom. The good result of the KDU-CSL can be explained by a particular set

⁶ See: S. Hanley, "The Czech EU Accession Referendum, 13-14 June 2003", Opposing Europe Research Network Referendum Briefing No 6, Sussex European Institute: University of Sussex, 2003 at <http://www.sussex.ac.uk/sei/documents/oernbczechref.pdf>.

⁷ See: STEM. Trendy 2004/3 (<http://www.stem.cz/index.php>).

of circumstances. Firstly, the party changed its leadership and the more charismatic Miroslav Kalousek replaced Cyril Svoboda. Kalousek was able to capitalise on his consistency, toughness in negotiations with political partners and anti-communist rhetoric. Second, the KDU-CSL entered the EP elections without its coalition partner from the last national election - the Union of Freedom. Given that the Union of Freedom was in its deepest existential crisis since its emergence in 1997, the decision of KDU-CSL to separate from the US was strategically astute. Finally, the KDU-CSL cleverly utilised its close ties with the European People's Party. In fact, the KDU-CSL best demonstrated its European dimension compared with other parties.

The major coalition party, the Social Democrats, faced a significant drop in support as it received only 8.78% of the votes in comparison to 30% that it obtained in last national parliamentary contest. Understandably, the CSSD suffered most from the overall dissatisfaction with the government as the party is one of the main architects of today's Czech politics. The unfortunate nominations for MEP candidates further contributed to the disastrous result of the CSSD. Leaving aside the inarticulate candidate leader Roucek, the public was shocked by the scandal regarding the second name on the candidate list - the trade union leader Richard Falbr who fell asleep twice during his observation visits to the European Parliament!

The junior coalition party, the Union of Freedom (US), which was for a long time the main promoter of European integration on the political scene, encountered the greatest electoral disaster as the party did not obtain the 5% threshold and will not be represented in the EP. The fact that the most pro-European party from the government did not obtain seats in the EP supports the notion that parties were assessed in accordance to their behaviour and achievements on the domestic political scene and much less in respect to their foreign (European) attitudes. It turned out that the Union of Freedom could not rely on the votes of convinced EU supporters in the June EP elections. Instead, pro-European motivated voters moved in the direction of the extra parliamentary political parties. This explains the decisive entrance on to the political scene of the Association of Independent Candidates-European Democrats (SNK-ED) with 11.02% of votes. The success of the Independent Candidates and the European Democrats was, in large part, determined by the nomination of the former minister of foreign affairs and recognised expert on European issues, Jozef Zieleniec.

The desire for a political alternative to incumbent parliamentary parties was also demonstrated in the electoral success of the Independents⁸ who obtained 8.18% of votes. This political grouping can also attribute its success to its candidates. A former director of the popular private TV channel, NOVA, Vladimír Železný who was in first place and journalist Jana Bobošíková from the same TV channel obtained their seats in the EP thanks to their general knowledge from media. The media magnate and temporary Senator Železný is currently being prosecuted for tax evasion and has lost his parliamentary immunity. Still, this circumstance did not deprive him of electoral success as Železný smartly accused the legal authorities of unjustly campaigning against his candidature. Indeed, Železný's politics perfectly copies the most classical form of populism – that is: anti-establishment rhetoric and expressions of sympathy to 'ordinary' people "The establishment is scared of me because I understand people," maintained Železný in *Mladá fronta Dnes*.⁹

⁸ 'The Independent' is a different party from the 'Association of Independent Candidates' the latter being a partner in the coalition Association of Independent Candidates-European Democrats.

⁹ See: *Mladá fronta Dnes* daily. 1 June 2004.

Lastly, the relatively good result of the Green Party (SZ) is worth mentioning. Even though Green Party members did not obtain seats in the European Parliament, they confirmed their increasing role in contemporary Czech politics. Despite their moderate campaign due to the lack of funding, the Green Party was able to attract 3.16% of voters. Also, admittedly, the final result of the Greens could have been even better if there was consent among its leadership. Still, the relative success of the party is a unique phenomenon in the politics of East Central Europe. We may expect that the influence of the Greens may increase in future elections, especially those for the European Parliament. It is highly probable that the Czech Greens will intensify their cooperation, especially the financial one, with their European partners. It is in the European Green's greatest interest to support their colleagues from the new EU member countries in order to increase their overall influence in European politics.

Table 1: June 2004 EP election results

| Party | Votes | Percent | 2002 | Change | MEPs |
|---|----------|---------|--------|---------|------|
| The Civic Democratic Party (ODS) | 700, 942 | 30.04 | 24.47 | +5.57% | 9 |
| The Czech Social Democratic Party (CSSD) | 204, 903 | 8.78 | 30.20 | -21.42% | 2 |
| Christian Democratic Union – the Czech People's Party (KDU-CSL) | 223, 383 | 9.57 | 14.27* | -4.7% | 2 |
| The Union of Freedom | 39, 655 | 1.69 | 14.27* | -12.58% | 0 |
| The Communist Party of the Czech Lands and Moravia (KSCM) | 472, 862 | 20.26 | 18.51 | +1.75% | 6 |
| The Association of Independent Candidates – European Democrats (SNK-ED) | 257, 278 | 11.02 | - | - | 3 |
| The Independents | 191, 025 | 8.18 | - | - | 2 |

Source: Official website of the Czech Statistical Office (CSU). www.volby.cz.

* KDU-CSL and US formed a coalition in the last national parliamentary elections in 2002. The presented number is their joint result.

Voter Turnout

Table 2: Turnouts in selected elections

| Elections | 1996 | 1998 | 2002 | 2003 | 2004 |
|--------------------------------|---------|--------|--------|------------------------|----------------|
| Parliamentary | 76.41 % | 74.03% | 58% | - | - |
| Senate (1 st round) | 35.03% | 42.37% | 24.10% | - | - |
| (2 nd round) | 30.63% | 20.36% | 32.55% | - | - |
| European | - | - | - | 55.21% (referendum) | 28.32% (EP) |

Source: Official website of the Czech Statistical Office (CSU). www.volby.cz.

Slightly more than 28% of Czechs turned out to vote in the first European elections. This was historically the lowest turnout in comparison with any national (lower chamber) parliamentary elections since 1989 (see Table 2). However, the turnout resembles the voter participation in Senate elections. The Senate, which was established in the new Constitution of 1993 and implemented only in 1996, is not considered credible (nor, indeed, necessary) among Czech citizens. In a similar vein, the Czechs perceive the European Parliament as an institution that is too distant, incomprehensible and with limited powers. Given that potential voters did not understand the significance of the EP

elections, they simply chose not to participate since they felt that they had already expressed their voice about Europe in the accession referendum. In addition, dissatisfied Czech citizens are generally not inclined to take part in elections. Many Czechs who were against their country's accession into the EU did not take part in the accession referendum in June 2003. It is highly probable that even now those who are convinced about the negative effects of EU membership might have decided to abstain rather than vote.

Conclusions and Future Prospects

Despite the little attention that the EP elections received, they succeeded in seriously shaking the entire Czech political scene. Firstly, the leader of the Union of Freedom, Petr Mareš, kept his promise of resigning from his position if his party failed to enter the EP. CSSD summoned a special national-level congress where Prime Minister Špidla was made subject to a party opinion poll. He received only very moderate support from his party and decided to resign the CSSD leadership. In the meantime, he handed in his government's resignation. The situation has become particularly complex since there have been several moves by parliamentarians in and out of the parliamentary political clubs and the temporary CSSD leader Stanislav Gross cannot form a majority government since President Klaus does not support a government with the participation of the Communists¹⁰. (The governmental crisis has not been resolved at the time of writing this paper, and early autumn elections still are a real option.)

Even though the EP results represented mainly a voice of rejection for the incumbent government, convinced supporters of European integration sought to oppose the government by supporting the pro-European extra-parliamentary Independent Candidates and European Democrats list. Thus, the high number of preferential votes (and votes in general) for Zieleniec seemed to represent a combination of government rejection and pro-European sentiment. However, it is questionable whether the Association of Independent Candidates and the European Democrats might also enter the national parliamentary political space. The answer so far is rather negative, which was proven by the exit polls. In the 12-13 June exit poll survey respondents were also asked how they would vote if these elections had been parliamentary ones. In such circumstances, the Association of Independent Candidates and European Democrats would not obtain seats in the national parliament. Similar results are suggested by other post-elections surveys that indicate a 2% level of support for the Independent Candidates and insignificant support for the European Democrats. Consequently, from these very first EP elections we may depict the emergence of some specific patterns deviating from the habitual election behaviour of the voters.

The greatest surprise of the EP elections in the Czech Republic, though, was the unexpectedly high number of votes for the Independents. They also profited from nominating a popular, although rather controversial, personality. Giving the preferential vote to Železný was a gesture in the direction of populism. People did not appear to mind choosing a person who is accused of enormous tax evasion and has been already deprived of his parliamentary immunity. This raises doubts about Czech political standards and culture. The question then remains whether this indicates the opening up of a new, so far unfulfilled, space for anti-establishment populism in the Czech Republic. So far this phenomenon has been observed only in neighbouring countries and perhaps most demonstratively in Poland.

¹⁰ The formation of any government with the active participation of KSCM has been a kind of taboo for any 'standard' Czech political party since 1989. Their discredited past has to date prevented any other party from considering a coalition with the communist successor party.

This is the latest in a series of election and referendum briefings produced by the European Parties Elections and Referendums Network (EPERN). Based in the Sussex European Institute, EPERN is an international network of scholars that was originally established as the Opposing Europe Research Network (OERN) in June 2000 to chart the divisions over Europe that exist within party systems. In August 2003 it was re-launched as EPERN to reflect a widening of its objectives to consider the broader impact of the European issue on the domestic politics of EU member and candidate states. The Network retains an independent stance on the issues under consideration. For more information and copies of all our publications visit our website at <http://www.sussex.ac.uk/sei/1-4-2.html>