

General Elections in the Czech Republic

28th and 29th May 2010

ANALYSIS
1 month before
the poll

On 5th February Czech President Vaclav Klaus announced that the next general elections would take place on 28th and 29th May 2010. 5,053 candidates, one quarter of whom are women, representing 27 parties are standing (ie +1 in comparison with the previous general election on 2nd and 3rd June 2006), 15 only are present in country's 14 regions (22 in Prague).

The general elections are vital for the two 'main' political parties – the Civic Democratic Party (ODS) and the Social Democratic Party (CSSD) – and the same goes for their leaders, Petr Necas (who replaces Mirek Topolánek) and Jiri Paroubek. «2010 will be of major importance because the general election, and later on the senatorial elections will also decide on the representation of the parties before the presidential election in 2013,» indicates political expert Petr Just. Indeed one third of the Czech Upper Chamber will be renewed next autumn.

The Czech Political System

The Czech Parliament is bicameral comprising the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate. The latter comprises 81 members elected for six years on a single majority list in two rounds and which is renewable by thirds. The choice of this mode of election matches the will of those who wrote the Constitution, and notably that of former President of the Republic (1993-2003), Vaclav Havel, who wanted to facilitate the election of independent personalities who were firmly established within the constituencies. The Senate however is still a largely misunderstood institution and the renewal of its members motivates few voters.

The Chamber of Deputies comprises 200 members for four years in a multi-nominal constituency election in which the distribution of votes is undertaken according to the greater remainder. All parties have to win a minimum of 5% of the votes cast to be able to be represented in parliament.

5 political parties are represented in the Chamber of Deputies at present:

- The Civic Democratic Party (ODS), founded by the present President, Vaclav Klaus and led since mid-April by Petr Necas who replaced former Prime Minister (2006-2009) Mirek Topolánek – 81 seats;

- The Social Democratic Party (CSSD), led by former Prime Minister Jiri Paroubek, has 74 seats;
- The Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (KSCM) – The heir of the Communist Party of the Socialist Republic of Czechoslovakia and the last non-reformed Communist party in Central Europe is led by Vojtech Filip – has 26 MPs;
- The Christian Democratic Union-People's Party (KDU-CSL), which lies to the right on the political scale is led by Cyril Svoboda, with 13 seats;
- The Green Party (SZ), founded in 1990, led by Ondrej Liska has 6 MPs.

A Democratic Civic Party in Disarray

On 20th March ODS leader and candidate for the post of Prime Minister Mirek Topolánek granted an interview in which he explained the weaknesses – at least their tendency to «give up when the situation became difficult» of Transport Minister Gustav Slamecka by the fact that he was homosexual and Prime Minister Jan Fischer because he was Jewish. In this interview he also accused the churches of «brainwashing the faithful in order to dominate better,» and suggested «imprisoning those who ate pork and cabbage dumplings (a traditional Czech dish) because they voted Social Democrat and to kick their backsides,» Mirek

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Topolánek excused himself afterwards for having spoken like this – saying that the words were taken out of context and had been badly interpreted. On 25th March he had to give up standing as lead candidate in the country's second town, Brno and on 12th April he resigned from his post as ODS leader.

This was not the first time that Mirek Topolánek, the first Head of government to fall after a no-confidence vote in Parliament in 2009, made mistakes in his attacks against journalists and with his vulgar, controversial declarations. In the spring of 2009 the Czechs did not really appreciate seeing him naked, surrounded by women in the Sardinian property of Italian Council President Silvio Berlusconi or to learn that in the summer of the same year he spent his holidays in Tuscany in the company of Czech industrialists and bankers. The former Prime Minister (2006-2009) had announced that he would leave his job if his party lost the general elections on 28th and 29th May next but his replacement had been planned for a long time by a party that has been diminished because of internal division. Although this change of leader seems dangerous just a few weeks before the election it might, according to political expert Jiri Pehe, provide new energy and a better image to the ODS.

The Civic Democratic Party which introduced a single 15% income tax and company tax is questioning increasing these. The ODS would like to introduce a single VAT rate (the normal rate is 19% and the reduced rate, 9%), which would lead to price rises and increase the burden on the poorest. To compensate for this increase the party is planning to review the fiscal system and tax the rich more, notably by increasing property tax. *«The rich must take part one way or another in the national sacrifice since increases in taxes and VAT affect the poorest,»* declared Mirek Topolánek.

The ODS is planning a return to budgetary balance in 2017. *«Czech society is threatened as in 1948 when the Communists took power with the defeat of freedom. In the post Second World War period the Communists said that speculators and rich peasants were responsible for the misery; now the populists say that the Liberals and the market are responsible for the*

recession. After the war salvation was supposed to come from the nationalization of the means of production; today friends of oppression and irresponsibility see the solution in piling up debts,» said Mirek Topolánek on 24th February during a conference on the crimes committed by the Communist regime.

The Civic Democratic Party seems more divided and more uncertain about its position and its future than ever before. The replacement of Mirek Topolánek has not solved its leadership problems. The ODS has been destabilized by the creation of the party, TOP 09 which is attempting to attract rightwing voters and to position itself as a liberal alternative. *«The Civic-Democratic Party does not need the Social Democratic Party to lose the elections,»* maintains political analyst Bohumil Pecinka who adds, *«the present manoeuvres that are emerging within the party are the guarantee of failure in way it has not known up until now.»*

Mid-April Petr Nečas threatened to stop his support of Jan Fischer's government in which after the departure of three ministers from the Green Party, the Social Democratic Party is now in the majority. *«There is no reason for the Civic-Democratic Party to support a government in which Jiri Paroubek in fact has the majority,»* he declared, demanding that the ODS be given the right to appoint ministers to the vacant positions.

Newcomers on the Right

Lagging behind the Social Democratic Party in the polls can the Civic-Democratic Party plan for government in alliance with other parties if its leftwing rivals do not win the absolute majority? Towards which partners can it turn?

In June 2009 the ODS and its leader Mirek Topolánek convinced former Finance Minister Miroslav Kalousek, the KDU-CSL leader to quit his party to found a new one. Three of the 7 centrist MPs followed the latter and rallied in a movement called the Open Democracy Club, the TOP 09. The party which is clearly positioned on the right of the political scale is led by former Foreign Minister (2007-2009) Karel Schwarzenberg.

TOP 09 recommends a policy that is more in favour of

companies. It supports the deregulation of the economy and wants to reduce social aid and unemployment benefits. «We are not offering new benefits or tax rebates and we are not making any promises that we shall not be able to keep,» declared the party's founder, Miroslav Kalousek.

Supported by the Movement of Mayors and Independents TOP 09 is particularly appreciated by traditional voters close to the ODS. «In the entire history of the Czech Republic since the Velvet Revolution in 1989 there has always been room for small political parties on the right of the political scale. These parties have always had an opportunity to enter the Chamber of Deputies and to complete the ranks of the big rightwing party that has been present since 2000 ie the Civic Democratic Party. And if we look at the polls it seems that TOP 09 is able to win more than 5% of the vote and that it might therefore play this role,» analyses political expert Petr Just.

Founded in 2001 as a local group and led by former journalist Radek John, Public Affairs (VV) has experienced a recovery just a few weeks from the elections. The VV party is leading the fight against the «political dinosaurs» (an expression which includes Jiri Paroubek as well as Mirek Topolanek) and corruption. He indicated that he would not make any alliance with either of the «big» parties as long as they had not got rid of their totally discredited leaders. The party is demanding the respect of the Maastricht criteria for the adoption of the euro, a reform of the health sector and the Czech social system, an increase in spending on education and the adoption of a real anti-corruption strategy. Radek John is also, according to the most recent poll by STEM mid-April, the most popular politician in the country with a 61% positive opinion rate. In his wake comes former Finance Minister (2002-2004 and 2005-2006) Bohuslav Sobotka (CSSD) who enjoys 50%, Karel Schwarzenberg with 43% and the new ODS leader Petr Necas with 40%.

President Vaclav Klaus warned voters asking them to be mistrustful of the new and to think before voting for a newly created party. «The situation is totally unique. Until recently people knew more or less for whom to vote and partisan preferences were stable.

Now everything has changed and the situation is extremely dangerous,» said the Head of State.

2010, a year for the Social Democrats?

The Social-Democratic Party chose to denounce the measures established over the last three years of Civic Democratic Party rule (2006-2009): reductions in social security allocations, medical fees introduced in January 2008 which oblige patients to pay 30 crowns on each consultation (90 crowns on a visit to the doctor out of hours), 30 crowns also for each prescription and 60 crowns for each day spent in hospital. Excluded from this measure are babies when they are still in the maternity clinic and children under 18 who have to undergo surgery. The CSSD has promised to do away with medical fees. The condemnation of these measures enabled it to win the regional elections on 17th and 18th October.

The CSSD is also promising to increase maternity benefits and healthcare reimbursement received by pensioners. Former Healthcare Minister (2005-2006), David Rath (CSSD) said that medical fees had not had the desired effect and warned that if the ODS wins the election it will form a coalition with TOP 09 and that medical fees will then be indexed. The Social Democrats have also promised to reduce chemists' fees and to re-introduce the payment of sick leave after three days of absence from work.

The CSSD also wants to decrease the number of healthcare insurance companies and transform them into state companies and non-profit making organisations. At present the Czech Republic has nine insurance companies, with VZP being the biggest. According to David Rath this measure would lead to savings of between four and five billion crowns. The party has promised to regulate energy, telecoms and bank services prices. It will increase taxes and re-introduce progressive income tax and establish a 38% taxation rate on income for those earning over 1.2 million crowns/year. The CSSD also wants to review progressive tax on inheritance beyond the 10 million crown mark and increase taxes on alcohol and tobacco.

In terms of the fight against corruption the Social Democrats have promised to update the financial police force and draw up a list of companies suspected of corruption. They indicated that they would

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use Joseph Wolfinger, former Deputy Director of the FBI, and Steve Pomerantz, former head of the FBI anti-terrorist unit to help them in the fight against financial crime.

Present Interior Minister Martin Pecina will lead the CSSD list in Prague. Martin Pecina may also retain his seat in government if the CSSD win. Apart from the former Jiri Paroubek might also take on former Healthcare Minister David Rath who would recover his post and Bohuslav Sobotka who might take over Finance, Zdenek-Skromach, the party's Vice-President since 2001 and former Social Affairs Minister (2002-2006), Lubomir Zaoralek, former speaker in the Chamber of Deputies (2002-2006) who would be appointed Foreign Minister, Milan Urban, former Trade and Industry Minister and Michal Hasek, regional governor of Southern Moravia. Economist Jan Svejnar, former economic advisor to Vaclav Havel from 1994-2003 and to Prime Minister Vladimir Spidla (CSSD) from 2002 and 2004 but also the unfortunate candidate in the Presidential run against Vaclav Havel in 2008 may be appointed to take care of Education. Finally Jan Kohout, present Foreign Minister may take over European Affairs.

«We prefer to cooperate with the centrist parties and primarily with the Christian Democratic Union- People's Party. It is what voters want. A major share of our electorate does not want a coalition with the Communists,» repeats Jiri Paroubek. Many of the party's members are against a coalition such as this. In March Jiri Paroubek said that a minority government was the best solution if the CSSD won.

Vojtech Filip (KSCM) repeats that the CSSD is about to form a coalition with the ODS as they have done in several regions. Mirek Topolanek repeatedly condemns the Social Democrats saying they are going to govern with the Communists and recalls that voters will have no means of rejecting this cooperation after the elections. Finally Jiri Paroubek says that if the left (CSSD and the KSCM) do not win the majority his party will be able to form the next government. In short, just one month before the election anything is possible: ranging from the alliance of the CSSD with the KSCM to a major coalition between the CSSD and the ODS.

The Social Democratic Party and the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia are both allies who each need one another and rivals who threaten each other. Vojtech Filip has helped to make the KSCM more pragmatic providing it with legitimacy and bringing it closer to the CSSD, resolutely trying to bring it out of the ostracism it has been victim of since the Velvet Revolution in 1989. Jiri Paroubek has led a totally opposite policy since 2006 when he took over the CSSD. However the area between the two parties has closed over the years.

But Jiri Paroubek needs the KSCM more than the Communist leader needs the CSSD. The KSCM is however due to be demanding (and put permanent pressure on the CSSD) in exchange for its support for a minority Social Democratic government. We should remember that the Social Democrats promised in 1995 not to cooperate nationally with the KSCM in the Bohumin resolution, the name of the town in which the CSSD congress was held.

Although he repeats he will not need the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia Jiri Paroubek has never clearly excluded cooperation with the KSCM. *«I would prefer a centre-left government - a minority government is a possible solution. I am not counting on the Communists for government,»* he declared without saying however who might support the potential minority government. Political analysts do not seem to believe in the creation of a grand right-left coalition, which is difficult to imagine after a year of government led by apolitical experts.

A new party has emerged on the left of the political scale. Former Prime Minister (1998-2002) Milos Zeman, who retired in 2003 after the failure of his election as president when he was beaten by Vaclav Klaus founded the Party of Citizens' Rights (SPO) in October. *«I did not want to stand but I was accused of cowardice, so I decided to stand,»* he declared without officially pointing to Jiri Paroubek against whom he will be standing in the constituency of Usti nad Labem. Martin Bursik, former Green leader and former Environment Minister 2007-2009 and Petr Gandalovic (CSSD) will also be standing in this constituency. Milos Zeman wants to abolish the government resolution of

1991 which established the limits of coal extraction in this former mining region severely affected by unemployment. The Citizens' Rights Party is also in favour of direct democracy and is against medical fees.

The other Parties

The Green Party member of the government coalition led by Mirek Topolánek then Jan Fischer, announced on 22nd March that it was withdrawing its support from Jan Fischer's government. It lost control of the Environment Ministry which Jan Dusík was in charge of; it is now in the hands of the Agriculture Ministry. Following this two other Green Ministers including Michael Kocáb, responsible for Human Rights resigned from office.

The Green Party has benefited in these general elections from the support of former President Václav Havel as well as many personalities from the cultural sphere: arts sponsor Meda Mladkova, actor Tomáš Hanák and former dissidents and writers such as Ivan Klíma and Ludvík Vaculík.

The party's leader Ondřej Liška is standing in Prague. Jirina Šiklová, sociologist, journalist and former dissident is standing in Hradec Králové and František Pelc in Central Bohemia.

But the Green Party is suffering from the image of being a divided party in which two camps fight each other without ever coming to agreement or finding clear solutions. The party lacks a leader who is able to rally its troops and convince them of the need to reach a compromise, the only way to influence political decisions. One positive point is their image of honesty, a real advantage in a country in which corruption is still rife. Hence the daily newspaper *Mladá fronta DNES* has tried to trap political parties by offering each of them one million crowns in exchange for a modification of the law on the national lottery. The Green Party representative was the only one to refuse this deal.

The Christian Democratic Union-People's Party, in spite of the departure of a major share of its members to create TOP 09 may retain its seats in the Chamber of Deputies. The KDU-CSL enjoys great support in the most agricultural regions. Its leader Cyril Svoboda

said that he would resign if the party did not succeed in entering Parliament.

On the far right the Workers Party (DS) led by Tomáš Vandas, which was dissolved in February last for threatening democracy and extremism (it was the first case involving the dissolution of a political party in the Czech Republic since 1989), will be standing in the general elections alongside the Social Justice Workers Party (DSSS). It is putting forward homophobic, racist ideas with an ideology that resembles national-socialism. Four of its members Tomáš Vandas, the party chairs, Jiří Štěpánek and Petr Kotáb and the editor of the party's newspaper, Martin Zbeda – have just been accused of promoting neo-nazism and hatred towards a group of people during a meeting which the party organised in Brno in May 2009.

The Sovereignty Party created by former MEP (non-inscrit) who was against the Lisbon Treaty, Jana Bobošíková will be standing in this election. Lawyer Klára Slamová will stand in Prague – this former Civic-Democratic Party Member said she was disappointed by the ODS which in her opinion has deviated from its initial programme – she also left because of the arrogance of some its leaders.

According to the latest poll by CVVM, published on 21st April the Social Democratic Party is due to win the election with 30% of the vote ahead of the Civic Democratic Party which is due to win 22.5%. In their wake come the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia who are due to win 13% of the vote, TOP 09 with 11.5% and Public Affairs, 9%. The Christian Democratic Union-People's Party and the Greens are not due to rise beyond the 5% threshold of votes necessary to be represented in the Chamber of Deputies. The last few weeks have revealed the collapse in support for the «big» parties and the rise of the «small» parties.

The Social Democratic Party may be affected by the resignation of the leader of the Chamber of Deputies, Miloš Věček (CSSD), who admitted breaking the law by paying back in cash one million crowns to his former assistant (in the Czech Republic any transfer of cash above 500,000 crowns is illegal).

Given the events of the last few months and notably

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the rise of new parties the composition of the next government may be uncertain until after the results have been announced. Outgoing Prime Minister Jan Fischer who accepted on 21st April to become Vice-

President of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development on September 1st said that he would remain in office if the political parties did not manage to form a new government rapidly.

Reminder of the general election results on 2nd and 3rd June 2006 in Czech Republic

Turnout: 64.47%

| Political Parties | N° of votes won | % of votes won | N° of seats |
|--|-----------------|----------------|-------------|
| Civic Democratic Party (ODS) | 1 892 475 | 35.38 | 81 |
| Social Democratic Party (CSSD) | 1 728 827 | 32.32 | 74 |
| Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (KSCM) | 685 328 | 12.81 | 26 |
| Christian Democratic Party-People's Party (KDU-CSL) | 386 706 | 7.23 | 13 |
| Green Party (CZ) | 336 487 | 6.29 | 6 |
| European Democrats (SNK) | 111 724 | 2.09 | 0 |
| Others | 207 429 | 3.88 | 0 |

Source : Czech Electoral Internet Site (<http://www.volby.cz/pls/ps2006/ps>)

D-7
7 days before
the poll

8 million Czechs are being called to ballot on 28th and 29th May to renew the 200 members of the Chamber of Deputies, the lower chamber in Parliament. 6,000 Czechs living abroad have registered on the electoral rolls (in some countries they are allowed to vote if they have an electoral card delivered by their town of residence). During the last elections on 2nd and 3rd June 2006, 6,702 Czechs living abroad fulfilled their civic duty. Most expatriates live in the USA, UK, Russia, Belgium, Australia and even in neighbouring Slovakia. This year as in 2006 they are being invited to choose their MPs from lists in South Bohemia. Czechs living abroad have been allowed to vote in the election since 14th and 15th June 2002.

The Social Democratic Party (CSSD) led by Jiri Paroubek announced that it wanted to save 129 billion crowns on the national budget. To implement this reform the CSSD experts have based themselves on international examples. The CSSD first wants to create a Central Purchases Coordination Bureau that would lead to savings of nearly 15% of the total sum ie 19 billion crowns. But apart from this savings plan the CSSD is also planning to increase social spending such as for example an increase in maternity allowance (the amount of which was reduced on 1st January 2010) and the development of nurseries in towns.

The latter measure also features on the Civic Demo-

cratic Party's (ODS) programme led by Petr Necas who replaced former Prime Minister (2006-2009) Mirek Topolánek mid-April as head of the ODS. The party wants to legalise the situation of the parent who stays at home to look after the children by reducing taxes by 5,000 crowns per dependent child. It is also planning to make parental leave more flexible and support part time work for parents as well as for older people. The ODS is promising to adopt the euro by January 2015 whilst the CSSD hopes to adopt the single currency in 2016.

Help for the elderly and the reform of retirement pen-

sions (the Czech Republic is one of the rare EU countries not to have undertaken this reform), feature at the heart of all of the political parties' programmes. The Constitutional Court declared that the present calculation of retirement pensions did not favour those with the highest salaries. According to Finance Minister, Eduard Janota the new system demanded by the Court will increase State spending by 10 billion crowns. The Czech state devotes 340 billion crowns to retirement pensions every year.

The ODS supports the funding of retirement pensions using private sources; the CSSD and the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (KSCM) hope that these will be guaranteed by the state; TOP 09 and the People's Christian Democratic Union (KDU-CSL) say that they are also in favour of increasing the minimum retirement pension for those living alone. The Communists want to increase the pension to 10,000 crowns for everyone (at present it is 6,600 crowns).

Political experts at the Masaryk University in Brno have studied the programmes of all of the parties and have decided that most of them lie in the centre of the political scale, (CSSD, the Green Party (CZ), Public Affairs (VV) and KDU-CSL) and that they offered almost identical solutions to the country's problems whilst the ODS and TOP 09, a party founded in June 2009 were firmly established on the right and the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia, on the left.

President of the Republic Vaclav Klaus said that he would never accept the appointment of a government that relied on the support of the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia. «If you ask me whether I have changed, I shall tell you clearly 'no',» he indicated. In 2004 the Head of State asked Stanislav Gross (CSSD), successor to Vladimir Spidla (CSSD) as Prime Minister to produce the signatures of 101 non-Communist MPs who were ready to support his work, it was only on this condition that the Czech President accepted the appointment of the government put forward by Stanislav Gross. According to the Constitution the Head of State can reject the government or one of its ministers which are put forward to him by the person he has appointed to form the government.

«A cooperation agreement can only be discussed if we have at least 105 seats in the Chamber of Deputies.

We had a bad experience with some MPs who changed party during the term in office and it is not good to govern if we have to rely on a weak majority,» declared Pavel Kovacik, KSCM leader of Parliament. The Communists are asking the CSSD for an increase in social spending and the building of housing in exchange for their support. The party's campaign leader in Prague, Jiri Dolejs declared that the Communists were ready to support the social democrats even if they refused to leave NATO – a measure which did however feature amongst the demands put forward by the KSCM. «Our electorate is expecting us to turn our proposals into reality,» maintained Jiri Dolejs.

The KSCM and the CSSD govern together in 5 of the country's 14 regions. Moravia-Silesia and Karlovy-Vary are led by a coalition that rallies both parties. In Vysocina, in the region of Pilsen and in Central Bohemia, the Social Democratic Party leads minority government enjoying Communist support. The polls show however that the creation of a CSSD/KSCM coalition worries the Social Democrat electorate.

The CSSD decided to boycott the three daily newspapers – Mlada fronta Dnes, Lidove noviny and Hospodarske noviny – and two weeklies, Respekt and Reflex which it accuses of «distilling hate in league with the parties on the right» - according to Jiri Paroubek the party's leader. «Jiri Paroubek's choice not to communicate with media which is read by 1.7 million people speaks for itself,» declared Jan Drazan, editor in chief of Lidove noviny.

The electoral campaign has been riddled with many incidents – violence that has been extremely clear in Czech political life for the last few months. On 5th May last in Brno Bohuslav Sobotka, former Finance Minister (2002-2004 and 2005-2006), Deputy Chair of the CSSD and chair of the parliamentary group was attacked by a drunk who hit him in the face – after this he was admitted to hospital. The day before that in Slany (Central Bohemia), the CSSD said how angry and worried it was after discovering posters which bore the following phrase: «My name is Jiri Paroubek and soon I shall be the first President to be assassinated.» In Kladno (Central Bohemia) bottles and sausages were thrown at people taking part in an electoral meeting. The social democratic leader said that these attacks

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were «a result of the hate campaign undertaken by the Civic Democratic Party under the management of campaign director, Ivan Langer.» For his part Petr Necas condemned the use of such posters but also said that this could be «provocation on the part of the Social Democratic Party itself.» Likewise he said after the attack on Bohuslav Sobotka that «the aggression with all the treacherous acts and personal attacks that it implied had been brought into this campaign by social democracy.»

Some electoral battles are also taking place before the courts. Radek John, leader of the Public Affairs Party, lodged a complaint against the CSSD for «constant aggression in the media, unverified speculation and fallacious declarations on the part of Jiri Paroubek.» The Public Affairs leader asked for an apology for the insults from the party which he is accusing of embezzlement and theft amongst other things. The Social Democratic leader answered that the legal proceedings did not scare him and that he would continue to inform citizens.

Radek John is also facing another accusation; that of having received several million crowns in cash at the end of April – this information was revealed by the dailies, Mlada fronta Dnes and Hospodarske noviny. Czech law prohibits political parties from receiving cash – sums which are given to them must be put into bank accounts.

The Public Affairs party accepted up to 500,000 crowns from its sponsors. In all the sum is said to have totalled 5.9 million crowns. «This is our accountant's fault,» said Radek John who says that he confirmed that the accountant had erroneously indicated that it was cash but that the sums had been put into a bank account. This information was denied by Vladimir Konicsek, director of the Monitoring Committee of Political Parties at the Chamber of Deputies.

Finally a lighter affair but with a dramatic outcome; TOP 09 which lies to the right of the political scale, led by former KDU-CSL leader, Miroslav Kalousek has been the focus of dozens of complaints after the party sent a bill of 121,000 crowns (4,700 €) to voters, i.e. the sum owed by every Czech as part of the national debt. Some voters did not understand that this paper was just a campaign tract which endeavoured to show how great the country's debt was and believed that they really had to pay such a sum – it set off violent reaction amongst the population, ranging from nervous breakdowns to fits of hysterics.

The Conference of Archbishops withdrew its support from the KDU-CSL on 28th and 29th May – since the Catholics fear that the party's leader, Cyril Svoboda will choose to ally himself with the CSSD after the election. The bishops indicated that they preferred TOP 09.

According to the latest poll by CVVM, the Social Democratic Party (CSSD) is due to come first in the general elections with 30.5% of the vote. It will be followed by the Civic-Democratic Party (ODS) with 19% of the vote – it is the first time since 2006 that the ODS has fallen below the 20% mark – TOP 09 is due to win 14%, the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (13%) and Public Affairs (11.5%). The Green Party and the KDU-CSL are not due to win the 5% necessary to be represented in Parliament. The Citizens' Rights Party (SPO), founded by former Prime Minister (1998-2002), Milos Zeman is only due to win 2% of the vote.

The electoral campaign started on 12th May in the media. «This does not influence the Czechs,» said political analyst Daniel Kunstat who said that the parties were suffering due to a lack of creativity: «The parties lack spirit and irony. With the exception of TOP 09 they all take things much too seriously.»

RESULTS

Although the Social Democratic Party (CSSD) came out ahead in the general elections that took place in the Czech Republic on 28th and 29th May winning 22.08% of the vote and 56 seats (a result that is far below that forecast in the polls), the rightwing seems to be the real winners of the election. The Civic Democratic Party (ODS) won 20.22% of the vote (53 seats), Tradition, Responsibility and Prosperity 09 (TOP 09), led by Karel Schwarzenberg won 16.7% of the vote (41 seats) and the Public Affairs Party (VV) led by Radek John, 10.88% (24 seats).

The Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (KSCM) won 11.27% (26 seats). «*20 years after November 1989 it is the first time that the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia did not take third place in the general elections and we are very happy,*» said Karel Schwarzenberg, chair of TOP09. «*Beating the Communists was our secret dream,*» declared Miroslav Kalousek, former Christian Union-People's Democratic Party leader (KDU-CSL) and present leader of the parliamentary group TOP09.

Two parties find themselves excluded from the Chamber of Deputies: the KDU-CSL which suffered due to the emergence of TOP09 which several of its former members joined; it only won 4.39% of the vote; the Green Party (CZ), which fell victim to its internal divisions as well as having spent 3 years in government (2006-2009) during which time it did not fulfil the promises it had made; it won 2.44% of the vote. The Citizens Rights Party (SPO) founded in October 2009 by former Social Democratic Party leader (1998-2002) Milos Zeman, also failed to rise beyond the 5% threshold of votes cast which are obligatory to be represented in the Chamber of Deputies – it won 4.33% of the vote.

The leftwing (CSSD and KSCM) won 82 seats together against 118 for the right (ODS, TOP09 and Public Affairs).

Turnout rose to 62.60% i.e. 1.87 points less than that recorded during the previous general election on 2nd and 3rd June 2006. Prague, Karlovy Vary and Western Bohemia were the regions with the highest turnout as was the case 4 years ago.

The right seems to be well placed to form the next government coalition. Tradition usually has it that the President of the Republic asks the leader of the party which won the election to form a government – but this might be overturned this time. CSSD leader, Jiri Paroubek also announced that he would resign from his post within the next few days. «*We cannot call it a success,*» he declared talking of the results achieved by his party, adding, «*people have chosen the direction the Czech Republic will take and this is different from the one the CSSD was offering them. The country is moving towards a centre-right coalition.*» The Social Democrats have certainly suffered from the

low popularity rate of former Prime Minister (2005-2006) Jiri Paroubek within the population. «*The party needs a new start,*» declared the latter announcing his resignation, saying that former Finance Minister and present deputy chair of the party, Bohuslav Sobotka, might replace him.

Cyril Svoboda, the KDU-CSL leader, Ondrej Liska, the Green leader and Milos Zeman, the Citizens Rights Party leader, also resigned from their positions.

Petr Necas, the ODS leader indicated that the resignation of the Social Democrat leader may lead to «*appeasement in the style of confrontation*» in the Czech political landscape. He said he was pleased that the ODS had «*a good chance of forming a coalition of budgetary responsibility, a coalition which the country needs in these difficult times, a coalition which we are ready for.*» «*It will be good news for the Czech Republic and for its citizens,*» he stressed, arguing that the Czechs showed by their votes that they hope to settle the country's debt problem. «*This will be the future government's key task,*» insisted Petr Necas. According to Jaroslav Plesl, editor of the daily Hospodarske Noviny, the fear of seeing the Czech Republic become «*the Greece of Central Europe*» was damaging to the CSSD which during the electoral campaign spoke in favour of a rise in public spending and social allocations. «*The Greek crisis was decisive in these general elections since it encouraged the fear that the policy undertaken by the Social Democrats would transform the country into another Greece,*» he declared.

Undeniably the Czechs expressed their lassitude with regard to the two «*main*» Czech parties i.e. the CSSD and the ODS who together achieved their lowest score since 1996. «*The results of these elections are a shock. It is the biggest victory for the right and a defeat for the left, mainly for the Social Democrats,*» declared political analyst Milan Znoj. «*The Czechs showed their discontent about the heavy polarisation of the political landscape which was started in their opinion by the country's two main political parties. It is clear that voters chose to give the new parties a chance,*» stressed political expert and director of the New York University of Prague, Jiri Pehe. «*The message of discontent voters wanted to send to the two*

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main parties is clear. But will it provide any results? In 2006 it took 9 months to form a government. And if we have problems again in forming a coalition there will plenty of small more or less licit agreements – everything which puts the voters off,» says Jan Hartl director of the pollster STEM.

Founded in June 2009, TOP 09 rallies some well known Czech personalities. The party is led by former Foreign Minister (2007-2009), Karel Schwarzenberg; Miroslav Kalousek, who was the founder and leader of the parliamentary group led the KDU-CSL between 2003-2006.

Founded in 2001 as a local group and led by former investigative journalist Radek John, Public Affairs (VV) is a less well know party. Its leader with a 61% positive opinion rate is the most popular Czech political leader according to the poll undertaken by STEM mid-April. Although its programme is not as clear as that of TOP09 (VV made the fight against the «*political dinosaurs*» one of the main points in its programme) the party has said that it is more interested in taking part in a rightwing government coalition that in an alliance with the parties on the left. Radek John announced his party's priority and set its conditions to take part in

a government: the adoption of a real anti-corruption strategy and the transfer of 10 billion crowns of the Defence budget towards Education. «*We do not want to follow the example of the «small» parties who give up their principles in exchange for ministerial posts,»* he declared.

The Czech Republic, a country led since 8th May 2009 by a government of experts should soon be governed by a rightwing government coalition rallying the ODS, TOP09 and probably VV led by Petr Necas, the ODS leader even though the resignation of Jiri Paroubek opens the way to other coalition possibilities such as for example a «*grand*» coalition to settle the public debt issue as quickly as possible. «*I am almost convinced that will soon be governed by a rightwing coalition and that we shall have a government that will enjoy a sound majority for the first time since 1996. This also means that this will follow a coherent rightwing programme that will focus on budgetary savings,»* declared Jiri Pehe. «*I really don't know which government we shall have because I have no idea what Public Affairs really is about*» stresses political expert Bohumil Dolezal.

General Election Results 28th-29th May 2010 in the Czech Republic

Turnout: 62.60%

| Political Parties | N° of votes won | % of votes won | N° of seats won |
|--|-----------------|----------------|-----------------|
| Social Democratic Party (CSSD) | 1155 267 | 22.08 | 56 |
| Civic Democratic Party (ODS) | 1057 792 | 20.22 | 53 |
| Tradition, Responsibility, Prosperity 09 (TOP 09) | 873 833 | 16.70 | 41 |
| Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (KSCM) | 589 765 | 11.27 | 26 |
| Public Affairs (VV) | 569 127 | 10.88 | 24 |
| Christian Democratic Party-People's Party (KDU-CSL) | 229 717 | 4.39 | 0 |
| Citizens Rights Party(SPO) | 226 527 | 4.33 | 0 |
| Sovereignty (S) | 192 145 | 3.67 | 0 |
| Green Party (CZ) | 127 831 | 2.44 | 0 |
| Others | 208 885 | 3.91 | 0 |

Source : Czech electoral internet site (<http://www.volby.cz/pls/ps2010/ps>)

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