

The Czechs will be electing the President of the Republic in January 2013 for the first time by direct universal suffrage

Nearly 10 million Czechs are being called to ballot on 11th and 12th January next to elect the President of the Republic for the first time by direct universal suffrage. Vaclav Klaus (Democratic-Civic Party ODS), who has held office for the last ten years (7th March 2003) and undertaken two successive mandates, is not allowed to stand again. If no candidate wins the absolute majority on 12th January next, a second round of voting will take place two weeks later i.e. on 25th and 26th January.

The polls show that the Czechs' interest in this first presidential election by direct universal suffrage is clear. According to a poll by the Centre for Public Opinion (CVVM), 80% of the Czechs support the election of the President of the Republic in this manner. Six voters in ten are due to turn out to vote on 11th and 12th January.

The Change in the Voting Method

Since 1993 the Czech President was elected in a secret vote by the two chambers of Parliament (the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate) which used to gather in the Spanish Hall of the Prague Castle, the official seat of the Presidency.

The last presidential election on 8th and 15th February 2008 was tumultuous and difficult, marred by accusations of corruption with a great deal of pressure being placed on MPs. Two votes were required to re-elect Vaclav Klaus as head of State.

During the first three rounds in the first election the atmosphere was particularly tense with the majority and the opposition arguing in front of the television cameras on which the election was broadcast live and watched by 800,000 viewers. The vote was delayed several hours because there was discussion about the voting method. The Greens (SZ) and the Social Democrats (CSSD) had suggested the vote take place by a show of hands, which was opposed by the ODS; finally this was accepted by the two chambers of Parliament. The Presidential

election therefore took place for the first time by a show of hands (the Czech Constitution does not specify which voting method should be used for the appointment of the President of the Republic, indicating only that he must be elected by the members of Parliament). Vaclav Klaus then declared that he thought the call for a vote by a show of hands had been a strategy used to prevent his re-election.

The voting method did not however prevent the outgoing Head of State from being re-elected on 15th January 2008 in the third round of the second election, winning by 30 votes over Jan Svejnar, who was supported by the Social Democratic Party, the Green Party, the Association of Independents-European Democrats (SNK-ED) and the Open Democracy Club (KOD). "There are things which happened that were not worthy of the democracy which the Czech Republic embodies," deemed Lukas Macek, director of the European Campus (Central and Eastern Europe) of Sciences Po in Dijon. The Blesk newspaper spoke of "the Czech Palermo" referring to the pressure and threats which were exercised on MPs.

The Results of the Presidential Election of 15th February 2008 in the Czech Republic

Candidates	No. of votes won
Vaclav Klaus (Democratic Civic Party, ODS)	141
Jan Svejnar (Social Democratic Party, CSSD, Greens, SZ, Association of Independents – European Democrats, SNK-ED, and the Club of Open Democracy, KOD)	111

Source : Czech Press Agency CTK

Presidential election in Czech republic 11th, 12th, 25th and 26th January 2013

Prime Minister Petr Necas, (ODS) who came to office after the victory of the rightwing in the general elections on 28th and 29th May 2010, included the change in the presidential voting method in his programme. Both parties in his government – Tradition, Responsibility, Prosperity 09 (TOP 09) and the Public Affairs Party (VV) – hold this promise dear. The head of State, Vaclav Klaus has always been against this change which he has qualified as a “fatal error”. He declared that *“the idea that the electorate will choose the President of the Republic is a mistake. He will be appointed by the media and those voting will simply approve this choice.”* The outgoing President believes that the Czech Republic is not ready for a development of this kind.

The law governing the election of the Czech President by direct universal suffrage entered into force on 1st October 2012. In order to stand every candidate has to have the support of at least 20 MPs or 10 Senators or 50,000 signatures from the electorate.

The law stipulates that the Head of State is not allowed to grant presidential pardon and that he will only enjoy immunity for the time of his mandate. Moreover the text extends the list of reasons why the President of the Republic can be removed from office. The Senate can, with the agreement of the Chamber of Deputies, lodge a complaint against him with the Constitutional Court, not only for treason but also if the Upper Chamber deems that the Head of State has infringed the Constitution or the constitutional order. A complaint like this requires, however, the vote of 3/5th's of the Senators and 2/3rd's of the MPs.

Finally the electoral law limits the campaign expenditure of the candidates running for the supreme office to 40 million crowns (i.e. 1.5 million €) (50 million crowns for the two days of voting i.e. 2 million €).

For a long time the ODS maintained that the change in the voting method for the presidential election was incompatible with parliamentary democracy. Some political analysts also believe that the presidential election by direct universal suffrage is foreign to the country's constitutional structure. *“Direct universal suffrage would only make sense if the Head of the Czech State enjoyed a great deal of power, which is not the case. Moreover it may worsen voter fatigue given the number of elections (regional, local, legislative and senatorial) which uncea-*

singly follow on from each other. In the beginning we might expect high turnout but this will tend to decline,” stresses lawyer Petr Kolman. *“People think that the fact of electing the President of the Republic themselves will guarantee a kind of control over the political parties but things will not happen like this,”* says sociologist Jirina Siklova.

“The problem with Czech politics is not the weakness of the President of the Republic but the weakness of the governments and the direct election of the Head of State may weaken these even further. The direct election of the President will not improve the Czech political system but will make its problems worse,” declared Tomas Lebeda, a political expert at the Faculty of Social Science at the University Charles of Prague. *“The political parties will occupy a privileged position in the organisation and the funding of the electoral campaigns whilst in the parliamentary vote system agreement can be found on an impartial president of the Republic as was the case with Vaclav Havel,”* stresses Jan Kysela, Professor of Constitutional Law at the University Charles of Prague.

Nine candidates

9 people are running officially in the presidential election:

- Jan Fischer, (independent), 61 years old, former Prime Minister (2009-2010). He collated 101,761 voters' signatures;
- Jiri Dienstbier (CSSD), 43 years old, Vice President of the Social Democratic Party supported by a group of 28 senators. Son of Jiri Dienstbier, signatory of the Charter 77 (text signed by dissidents opposed to the socialist normalisation process of Czechoslovak society in the 1970's) and former Foreign Affairs Minister, he defends greater European integration;
- Milos Zeman (The Citizens' Rights Party, SPOZ), 68 years old, former Prime Minister (1998-2002). He collated 105,400 voters' signatures;
- Premysl Sobotka (ODS), 68 years old, Vice President of the Senate supported by a group of 41 MPs and 23 Senators. He was appointed candidate in July after a primary election in his party in which he came out ahead of MEP Evzen Tosenovsky;
- Karel Schwarzenberg (TOP 09), 74 years old, present Foreign Minister; supported by a group of MPs. He is standing as the only real opponent to outgoing President Vaclav Klaus;

- Zuzana Roithova (Christian Democratic Union – People’s Party, KDU-CSL), 59 years old, MEP and former Healthcare Minister (January-July 1998), collated 80,900 voters’ signatures;
- Tatana Fischerova (independent but supported by the Green Party, CZ), 65 years old, actress. Former MP for the Freedom Union-Democratic Union (US-DEU) between 2002 and 2006, she founded the Klicové hnutí association in 2008 (The Key Movement) which advocates total political, economic and cultural independence. In her opinion “the election of the Head of State by direct universal suffrage must lead civil society to the choice of a personality who is not associated to a party or to political or economic power structures”. She collated 72, 600 signatures;
- Vladimir Franz (independent), 53 years old, composer and artist. Supported by 88,400 voters he wants to “mobilise civil society so that people think more, read between the lines and allow no one to dupe them”;
- Jana Bobosikova (Sovereignty, SBB), 48 years old, former Director of the editorial staff of the public television channel and former MEP (2004-2009), a nationalist and against the European Union.

The Interior Minister rejected the candidature of two people (former Industry and Trade Minister (1992-1997) Vladimir Dlouhy and Senator and businessman Tomio Okamura) deeming that a major share of the signatures that they presented were not valid.

The Electoral Campaign

The Czech leftwing is somewhat divided in this presidential election. Jiri Dienstbier, the Social Democratic Party’s official candidate is facing strong competition on the part of Milos Zeman within the left leaning electorate; the latter led the opposition party between 1993 and 2002 before quitting five years ago. Analysts wonder what the supporters of the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (KSCM) will do in the first round. Indeed the party is not putting any candidate forward and on 8th December last chose not to support either of the leftwing candidates. The leader of the communist group Jiri Dolejs has said that in his opinion Jiri Dienstbier leant “more to the left” than Milos Zeman. The Social Democratic leader Bohuslav Sobotka wrote to his communist counterpart Vojtech Filip to remind him that Jiri Dienstbier was the only leftwing candidate. He also warned

him of the danger of a lack of cooperation between the Social Democrats and the Communists, which might lead to a second round in which two centre-right candidates would face each other, i.e. a failure for the left. Jiri Dienstbier has said that personally he disagreed with the KSCM but that the social dimension which the party held was vital in his opinion. As for Milos Zeman he is unconditionally trying to attract all of the electorate. The former Prime Minister is not against cooperating with Vojtech Filip’s party. “Communists are dangerous only if they have the USSR and its tanks behind them,” he stressed.

Jan Fischer and Milos Zeman have also been criticised because of their former membership of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (KSC) which governed Czechoslovakia from 1948 until the Velvet Revolution at the end of 1989. The former was a member from 1980 to 1989 and the latter between 1968 and 1970 (the year in which he was excluded from it). Former Czechoslovak political prisoners, who were persecuted by the former communist regime, have said they will not go to the Castle of Prague to receive their medal for their resistance against totalitarianism, if Milos Zeman or Jan Fischer are elected as Head of State in January next.

Interviewed by the country’s daily *Mlada fronta Dnes* (Youth Front) on 9th November last about the reason why the Czechs should vote for him on 11th and 12th January next the ODS candidate Premysl Sobotka answered “because I have never been a communist.” “Can we grant the office of President of the Republic to a former member of the Communist Party?” he asks.

Just one month before the election Jan Fischer and Milos Zeman are leading in the polls. The independent candidate is due to win 25% of the vote in the first round, whilst the Citizens’ Rights candidate is due to win 25.6%. Social Democrat Jiri Dienstbier is due to come third with 10.6% of the vote.

A test presidential election was organised amongst 61,500 secondary school pupils. Vladimir Franz came first with 40.7% of the vote. He was followed by Jan Fischer who won 19.4% of the vote, Karel Schwarzenberg, who won 14.6% and finally Milos Zeman, 9.4%. Vaclav Klaus’s mandate will officially come to an end on 7th March next.

Milos Zeman and Karel Schwarzenberg will face each other in the second round of the Presidential election in the Czech Republic

Results (1st round)

The first presidential election to take place by direct universal suffrage was the source of surprise in the Czech Republic. Although Milos Zeman, former Social Democratic Prime Minister (1998-2002), now honorary chair of the Citizens' Rights Party (SPOZ) which he created in 2010, won the election with 24.21% of the vote, second place went to Foreign Minister Karel Schwarzenberg (Tradition, Responsibility, Prosperity 09, TOP09), who won 23.40% of the vote.

Milos Zeman won eight of the fourteen regions in the Czech Republic (winning many votes in Moravia and North Bohemia), Karel Schwarzenberg won in the capital, Prague and amongst the Czechs living abroad. He also won the highest scores in the country's major towns whilst the former Prime Minister won the support of the rural areas and the smallest towns.

Jan Fischer, former Prime Minister (2009-2010) who was standing as an independent and forecast favourite to move on into the second round by all of the polls came third with 16.35% of the vote. He was followed very closely by the Deputy Chair of the Social Democratic Party (CSSD), Jiri Dienstbier with 16.12%. Vladimir Franz, composer and painter, whose body and face are entirely tattooed, won 6.84%; MEP Zuzana Roithova (Christian-Democratic Union/People's Party, KDU-CSL) won 4.95% and actress Tatana Fischerova, who was standing as an independent but with the support of the Green Party, (CZ) won 3.23% of the vote. Premysl Sobotka (Civic

Democratic Party, ODS), Vice-President of the Senate and representative of those in office in Prague at present was the grand loser of this presidential election He won 2.46% of the vote. Outgoing President of the Republic, Vaclav Klaus (ODS) said that this result was the "*biggest failure of the right in the country's post-communist history and a terrible defeat for the Civic-Democratic Party.*" Finally, former MEP (2004-2009), nationalist and opponent to the European Union, Jana Bobosikova (Sovereignty) won 2.39% of the vote. Turnout in this first presidential election by direct universal suffrage totalled 61.31%.

Results of the 1st round of the Presidential election on 11th & 12th January 2013 in the Czech Republic

Turnout: 61.31%

Candidates	No. of votes won (first round)	% of votes won (first round)
Milos Zeman (Citizens Rights Party, SPOZ)	1 245 848	24,21
Karel Schwarzenberg (Tradition, Responsibility, Prosperity 09, TOP 09)	1 204 195	23,40
Jan Fischer (independent)	841 437	16,35
Jiri Dienstbier (Social-Democratic Party, CSSD)	829 297	16,12
Vladimir Franz (independent)	351 916	6,84

Zuzana Roithova (Christian-Democratic Union-People's Party, KDU-CSL)	255 045	4,95
Tatana Fischerova ((independent supported by the Green Party, CZ)	166 211	3,23
Premysl Sobotka (ODS)	126 846	2,46
Jana Bobosikova (Sovereignty, SBB)	123 171	2,39

Source: Site internet of the elections in the Czech Republic (<http://www.volby.cz/pls/prez2013/pe2?xjazyk=CZ>)

"The presidential duel will be between the left and the right," declared Milos Zeman after the announcement of the results. Although he belongs to the left he is calling on all of the Czechs. "I am a leftwing politician but I am addressing all of the electorate both on the left and the right." Milos Zeman accuses his adversary of belonging to a government that has been undermined by several corruption scandals and which is implementing a policy of austerity. "Karel Schwarzenberg is the man who as Minister and Deputy Prime Minister voted in support of austerity, a rise in VAT on food and medicines and for the reform of retirement pensions," he stressed

Aged 68, Milos Zeman joined the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (KSC) in 1968 only to be excluded from it two years later. After the Velvet Revolution in 1989, which brought down the Communist regime in Czechoslovakia, he joined the Social Democratic Party of which he became the leader in 1993. Appointed Prime Minister in 1998 he signed a pact called "Agreement for the creation of a stable political environment in the Czech Republic" with the Civic-Democratic Party, which was led by Vaclav Klaus at the time. According to this agreement the latter party promised not to lodge a motion of censure against the Social Democratic government led by Milos Zeman during the entire duration of the legislature. In exchange the Civic-Democratic Party was to be consulted before the vote on any major project and obtained access to strategic posts in various institutions on behalf of its members (the chair of the Chamber of Deputies was granted to Vaclav Klaus). In 2003, Milos Zeman stood in the presidential election and failed. He officially chose to retire from political life. However, seven years later he is back and has founded his own party. Interviewed on the reasons for his bid in the presidential election Milos Zeman answered, "two factors pushed me to stand: on the one hand the electoral system has changed. Now 8 million legitimate voters will be electing the president and you cannot corrupt them (...) On the other hand it is a response to the situation in which our political arena finds itself in which a group of amateurs are at work considering politics as an art they

can learn." He believes he is close to the Czech people and insists on the importance of the role of President of the Republic in terms of domestic policy. "From this point of view I would like to follow on from Vaclav Klaus: above all the President should be able to travel to the various regions of the country. I find his role in terms of domestic policy more important than travelling to exotic countries. Apart from exceptional crises it is the Prime Minister who should travel to the EU summits and it should be the Foreign Minister who travels abroad," he indicated.

Milos Zeman will be supported by the Social Democratic Party and the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (KSCM) in the 2nd round.

"Milos Zeman will be a major adversary but he represents the past," stressed Karel Schwarzenberg after the announcement of the results.

Seven years older than his rival, the TOP09 candidate, whose full name is Karel Johannes Nepomuk Josef Norbert Friedrich Antonius Wratislaw Mena Furst zu Schwarzenberg, is the descendent of an aristocratic family of Bohemia. Since his parents fled the communist regime in Czechoslovakia in 1948 Karel Schwarzenberg lived for 41 years in exile, notably in Austria, Germany and in Switzerland. Extremely active in the fight to counter communism he took part in the funding of the opposition at the time of communist Czechoslovakia; a Human Rights lawyer he chaired the International Federation of Human Rights in Helsinki from 1984 to 1991. He returned to Czechoslovakia after the Velvet Revolution in 1989 and became Chancellor of the former President of the Republic (1993-2003) Vaclav Havel who said that he was "an extremely qualified man" and saw him as a "European, patriot and gentleman." Karel Schwarzenberg was elected to the Senate in 2004 and remained there until 2010.

"I hope that I shall succeed over the five years of my term to take our society to a point where we can really say that our country's motto "The Truth will win vanquish" matches reality," he indicated.

Karel Schwarzenberg will have the support of the Civic-Democratic Party led by Prime Minister Petr Necas and the Christian Democratic Union-People's Party. Tatana Fischerova announced that she would probably vote for Karel Schwarzenberg on 25th and 26th January next. For the time being Vladimir Franz and Jan Fischer have not given any voting advice. The latter did say however that Karel Schwarzenberg was the candidate to whom he felt the closest.

This election is taking place as the Czech Republic finds itself in a period of economic recession. According to forecasts growth might total 0.2% in 2013 however. The unemployment rate has increased sharply to reach 9.4% in December. The government led by Petr Necas (ODS) to which TOP09 belongs, likewise the Liberal-Democrats (LIDEM) led by Karolina Peake, lost its majority in the Chamber of Deputies and suffered a regional and senatorial electoral defeat in October 2012.

Vaclav Klaus, the President of the Republic decided on the 20th anniversary of the independence of the Czech Republic on 1st January last to amnesty 7,400 prisoners (who had been sentenced to under one year in prison and those aged over 75 sentenced to under 10 years) out of a total of 23,000, was the cause of an uproar. The Head of State is suspected of having wanted to release people that he helped to get rich during the privatisation of the Czech economy in the 1990's whilst he was Finance Minister (1989-1992) and then Prime Minister (1992-1997). "It is scandalous that the amnesty will allow the liberation of people who were involved in serious affairs of embezzlement and tax fraud," declared the leader of the Social Democratic Party Bohuslav Sobotka. "We hope that the presidential election will

enable the return of the portrait of the Head of State to its rightful position on the wall" read an information site Aktualne.cz. The mayors of hundreds of communities indeed took the official portrait of the president down from their walls in protest against the amnesty decided upon by Vaclav Klaus.

Both candidates in the 2nd round have two things in common. They both speak their minds and are pro-European. Karel Schwarzenberg is a supporter of an "Inclusive European Union". "I promise to do everything possible for us to become a country of order and success at the heart of Europe," he declared adding, "the Czech Republic is at the heart of Europe, we should not be an island." Milos Zeman qualifies himself as a "euro-federalist" and supports a "firming up of the EU's structures, including a common economic policy."

The winner of the second round will put an end to the 10 year mandate of eurosceptic Vaclav Klaus. In 2003 he refused to campaign for the "yes" in the referendum on his country's accession to the EU and refused to raise the European flag over the Castle of Prague, the residency of the Czech Heads of State. In 2009, Vaclav Klaus again delayed the ratification of the Lisbon Treaty by several months. He mocked the attribution of the Nobel Peace Prize to the European Union in 2012. "Vaclav Klaus turned his fight against the European Union into a personal battle and forgot that he was mainly there to defend interests of the Czech Republic," maintains Josef Mlejnek, a political scientist. "Whoever becomes President of the Republic will be more pro-European than Vaclav Klaus," indicated Jiri Pehe, political scientist and director of the New York University of Prague.

Milos Zeman, the new President of the Czech Republic

Results (2nd round)

Milos Zeman, former Social Democratic Prime Minister, (1998-2002), honorary chair of the Citizens' Rights Party (SPO), which he created in 2010, was elected on 26th January President of the Czech Republic with 54.8% of the vote in the country's first presidential election by direct universal suffrage. He drew ahead of Foreign Minister Karel Schwarzenberg (Tradition, Responsibility, Prosperity 09, TOP09), who won 45.19% of the vote.

Milos Zeman rallied the votes of the left and enjoyed strong support on the part of voters in the provinces, whilst Karel Schwarzenberg won Prague and several major towns (Brno, Plzen, Liberec, Ceske Budejovice, Hradec Kralove, Karlovy Vary and Zlin). The former

Prime Minister did not receive the support of the official candidate of the biggest left wing party, the Social Democratic Party's (CSSD), Jiri Dienstbier (16.12% of the vote in the first round), who refused to give any voting advice for the second round, qualifying both candidates

as being “fundamentally on the right” and accused Milos Zeman of having links with the Mafia. The Social Democratic Party leader Bohuslav Sobotka, said however that he was delighted with the latter’s victory. The former Prime Minister called for the support of the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (KSCM) between the two rounds of the election and received the support of outgoing President Vaclav Klaus, who explained that he wanted the head of State to be a citizen who had lived

his entire life in the Czech Republic – “in the good and bad times”. Karel Schwarzenberg’s family fled the communist regime that was established in the former Czechoslovakia in 1948; the Foreign Minister lived in exile for 41 years, notably in Austria, Germany and in Switzerland, before returning to his homeland.

The turnout rate totalled 59.11% ie -2.2 points less in comparison with the figure recorded in the first round. The Czechs abroad voted more than two weeks ago.

Results of the Presidential Election on 11th and 12th 25th-26th January 2013 in the Czech Republic

Turnout: 61.31% (1st round) and 59.11% (2nd round)

Candidates	No. votes won (1st round)	% of votes won (1st round)	No. votes won (2nd round)	% of votes won (2nd round)
Milos Zeman (Citizens’ Rights Party, SPO)	1 245 848	24,21	2 717 405	54,80
Karel Schwarzenberg (Tradition, Responsibility, Prosperity 09, TOP 09)	1 204 195	23,40	2 241 171	45,20
Jan Fischer (Independent)	841 437	16,35		
Jiri Dienstbier (Social Democratic Party, CSSD)	829 297	16,12		
Vladimir Franz (independent)	351 916	6,84		
Zuzana Roithova (Union chrétienne-démocrate-Parti du peuple, KDU-CSL)	255 045	4,95		
Tatana Fischerova (indépendante soutenue par le Parti des Verts, CZ)	166 211	3,23		
Premysl Sobotka (ODS)	126 846	2,46		
Jana Bobosikova (Sovereignty, SBB)	123 171	2,39		

Source : <http://www.volby.cz/pls/prez2013/pe2?xjazyk=CZ>

An aggressive electoral campaign

Karel Schwarzenberg quickly admitted defeat but explored the way that the electoral campaign had been undertaken, accusing his rival of lying, notably when Milos Zeman maintained that he saw in him the defender of the cause of three million Sudeten Germans who were thrown out of the Czech Republic after the Second World War. “*The ten point difference is the product of this type of campaign, it is impossible to defend oneself from disparagement,*” declared Karel Schwarzenberg.

The Benes Decrees, named after their signatory, former President of Czechoslovakia Edvard Benes, who from 1938 to 1945 led the Czechoslovak government in exile (he resigned in 1948 after the communist coup d’état) made a surprise entry into the electoral campaign. These four documents – on the national administration of the property of the Germans, Hungarians and traitors (19th June), the deprivation of Germans and Hungarians of Czechoslovak citizenship (2nd August) and the confiscation of enemy property (25th October) - date back to 1945. They led to the expulsion and dispossession of around 3 million Germans and 100,000

Presidential election in Czech republic 11th, 12th, 25th and 26th January 2013

Hungarians who were living in the Sudetenland at the end of the Second World War. Although the Benes Decrees no longer have any legal force, they do continue to be part of Czech legislation.

During one of two televised debates, which brought Milos Zeman and Karel Schwarzenberg face to face between rounds, the latter maintained that an expulsion like that perpetrated against the Sudeten Germans would be condemned as a gross infringement of Human Rights and that today the government of the time, together with President Benes would be convened to the Hague (seat of the international court of justice). The daily *Blesk*, published an advert ordered by a former Czechoslovak Security Officer (StB), the former Communist political police accusing the Foreign Minister of supporting the Sudeten Germans. *"It is a lie! A smear!"* protested Karel Schwarzenberg who denied wanting to reassess the demands for the restitution of property that was seized at the time.

Prime Minister Petr Necas (Civic Democratic Party, ODS) spoke of an *"hysterical campaign that had divided society."* This polemic designed to question Karel Schwarzenberg's patriotism undoubtedly affected him less than its instigators wanted in the election result since the Czech electorate was more worried about other subjects, notably socio-economic issues. Karel Schwarzenberg certainly suffered more for his involvement with Petr Necas's government, which is extremely unpopular due to its austerity policy. *"It certainly did not help me,"* he admitted.

The election of Milos Zeman marks the end of the euro-sceptic reign of Vaclav Klaus. The new head of State stands as a "euro-federalist"; he supports a *"tightening of the EU's structures including a joint economic policy and a European army."* *"Milos Zeman will be a pro-European President. He is certainly not an unreserved euro-enthusiast but his approach to the EU will surely be more rational than that of Vaclav Klaus,"* indicated Tomas Lebeda, a political analyst at the Charles University of Prague. The new head of State has said that he will raise the European flag above the Castle of Prague, the residency of Czech Presidents, which his predecessor had refused to do. Although Milos Zeman should bring Prague closer to its European partners, the new president might also draw closer with Russia with whom he entertains close relations.

Cohabitation as Head of State

The Czech Republic now has a rightwing government and a leftwing president. Before the election Mr Zeman stressed that the Head of State elected by direct universal suffrage *"enjoyed a stronger mandate to criticise the unpopular government."* During his electoral campaign he disapproved the Prime Minister Petr Necas's action, notably his reform of taxation, retirement pensions and the restitution of property to the Church confiscated by the former communist regime.

"A leftwing president should logically be opposed to a rightwing government," indicated Milos Zeman when it was announced that he had won. Hence he immediately said that he wanted early elections to be organised. *"As the government is only maintained in office thanks to a party that was not elected after a free election and which only comprises defectors, it seems desirable to organise early general elections,"* he stressed. Petr Necas's government rallies the Civic-Democratic Party (ODS), the Liberal Democrats (LIDEM), which emerged after the division of the Public Affairs Party (VV) which was initially part of the government coalition and TOP09. The Prime Minister lost his majority in the Lower Chamber and has survived five motions of censure, the most recent dating back to 17th January.

"The government's situation will become even more complicated. It will be like a tug-of-war," maintains Tomas Lebeda, who adds, *"Milos Zeman is a strong player. Since he has been elected by direct universal suffrage he will want to impose his authority on the political stage."* *"I do not doubt that Milos Zeman will respect the constitutional order,"* maintains Petr Necas, alluding to the restricted powers of the Czech head of State. The latter did however say that he would be a *"regular, noisy visitor"* at the government's meeting.

Who is the new President of the Czech Republic?

Milos Zeman, who is 68 years old, is an economist. He joined the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (KSC) in 1968 before being excluded from it two years later. In 1992 he became a member of the Social Democratic Party which he became the leader of the following year. In 1996 he was appointed Speaker of the Chamber of

Deputies. Appointed Prime Minister in 1998 he signed a pact called "*an agreement for the creation of a stable political environment in the Czech Republic,*" with the Civic Democratic Party (ODS), which at the time was led by Vaclav Klaus. According to this agreement the latter promised not to launch a motion of censure against the Social Democratic government led by Milos Zeman for the entire duration of the legislature. In exchange the ODS was consulted before the vote on any major project and achieved access to some strategic posts in various institutions on behalf of its members (the Speaker of the Chamber of Deputies went to Vaclav Klaus for example).

In 2003, Milos Zeman ran in the presidential election for the first time. He failed. Vaclav Klaus was finally

elected as head of State. He then chose to withdraw from political life. He came back seven years later however to found the Citizens' Rights Party (SPO) in 2010, which, with 4.33% of the vote, failed to enter parliament during the general elections on 28th and 29th May 2010 (a minimum of 5% of the votes cast is required to be represented). Milos Zeman then resigned from the leadership of the party of which he was elected honorary chairman last November.

The new head of State will be sworn in on 8th March in the Wenceslas Hall at the Castle of Prague with the members of the two Chambers of Parliament in attendance (the 200 members of the Chamber of Deputies and the 81 Members of the Senate). He announced that his first official trip would take him to Slovakia.

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