

The right-wing coalition Spolu (Together) ahead in the Czech legislative election

Three centre-right and right-wing parties have joined forces in a coalition to remove the outgoing Prime Minister, Andrej Babis, from power. In the *Spolu* coalition (which means Together), the Democratic-Civic Party (ODS), the Christian Democratic Union-People's Party (KDU-CSL) and Tradition, Responsibility, Prosperity 09 (TOP 09) won 27.79% of the vote and 71 seats in the Chamber of Deputies, the lower house of parliament, in the general elections held on 8 and 9 October.

ANO, the party led by Andrej Babis, won 27.13% of the vote and 72 seats, -6 compared to the previous general elections on 20-21 October 2017, but also one more than the *Spolu* coalition.

Pirati a Starostove (PaS), a coalition that includes the Pirate Party (CSP) and Mayors and Independents (STAN), won 15.61% of the vote and 37 seats. STAN has confirmed its local anchorage according to the results of the preferential votes^[1] and is well ahead of its coalition partner in terms of elected members: Mayors and Independents won 33 of the 37 seats won by the coalition. Moreover, according to Petr Just, professor of political science at Prague Metropolitan University, the coalition's lower-than-expected result can be partly explained by the fact that many Czechs consider Petr Fiala a more credible leader than Ivan Bartos, leader of the Pirate Party.

Freedom and Direct Democracy (SPD), a right-wing populist party led by Tomio Okamura, came fourth with 9.56% of the vote and 20 elected members (-2).

The left parties suffered a very serious blow and have disappeared from the Chamber of Deputies. The Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (KSCM), the last unreformed communist party in Central Europe, led by Vojtech Filip, won 3.6% of the vote, below the 5% threshold a political party must reach to be represented in the Chamber of Deputies. "*The Communists' electoral base is disappearing or leaving them in favour of other parties. They are clearly unable to reform to ensure their survival,*" said Otto Eibl, professor of political science at Masaryk University in Brno. "*By supporting the government, the Communists lost their status as a protest party. There are now more active protest parties. In addition, Andrej Babis has won back some of the retired voters who used to vote Communist or more broadly left-wing,*" confirmed Josef Mlejnek, a political scientist at Charles University in Prague.

The Social Democratic Party (CSSD), chaired by outgoing Deputy Prime Minister and Interior Minister Jan Hamacek and a member of the government coalition, suffered the same fate as the Communists, securing 4.65% of the vote. Its leader declared after the elections that he would resign from office.

Oath (Prisaha, P), a party founded by the former senior officer of the police unit against organised crime, Robert Slachta, also finished below the 5% threshold of the votes cast but nevertheless with 4.68% managed to do better than the two left-wing parties.

Turnout rose to 65.43%, i.e. +4.59 points compared to the previous elections of 20 and 21 October 2017.

^[1] Czech voters may express their preference for four of the candidates on the list. Candidates who win more than 5% of the preferential votes at the regional level are then placed at the top of their party list. When more than 5 per cent of the preferential votes are obtained by more than one candidate, they are ranked in descending order according to the total number of preferential votes they have received.

General elections in Czech Republic 8-9th October 2021

02

Results of the general elections of 8 and 9 October 2021 in the Czech Republic

Turnout: 65.43%

Political Parties	Number of votes won	Percentage of votes cast	Number of seats
Spolu Coalition (Together)	1 493 905	27.79	71
ANO	1 458 140	27.13	72
Pirati a Starostove Coalition (PaS)	839 776	15.61	37
Freedom and Direct Democracy (SPD)	513 910	9.56	20
Oath (P)	251 562	4.68	0
Social Democratic Party (CSSD)	250 397	4.65	0
Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (KSCM)	193 817	3.60	0
Others	373 583	6.98	0

Source : <https://www.volby.cz/pls/ps2021/ps2?xjazyk=CZ>

"Both coalitions have a majority. Together, our country will no longer be so indebted, and it will be part of democratic Europe," declared a delighted Petr Fiala on the announcement of the results, adding "We have a very strong mandate and no one can steal this victory from us."

The ODS leader is well on his way to becoming Prime Minister. Spolu has declared that it wants to join forces with the Pirati a Starostove coalition to try to form a government.

The two-party alliances, which declared during the election campaign that they would not govern with Andrej Babis (even if Spolu did not completely reject the idea of negotiating with an ANO party without Babis), have committed to negotiating without the participation of other parties. They held a joint press conference after the announcement of the results in which they asked the President of the Republic, Milos Zeman, (Citizens' Rights Party, SPOZ) to entrust Petr Fiala with forming the new government. "It seems that both democratic coalitions will manage to get a parliamentary majority, which most probably means that Andrej Babis will have to leave," said Otto Eibl.

Andrej Babis relied on his socio-economic results throughout the election campaign. The Czech economy has been quite prosperous and the outgoing Prime

Minister, allied with the Social Democrats, has increased pensions and wages and lowered taxes.

"After siphoning off the centre-right electorate in 2013, Andrej Babis ploughed into the social democrats in 2017. Today, he has campaigned to woo the anti-migrant and Eurosceptic electorate," said Lukas Macek, director of the Sciences Po campus in Dijon. Andrej Babis, aware of the weakness of his left-wing allies, had indeed tried to attract voters on the right by accusing his opponents of wanting to host all migrants who come to the country's doors and by receiving in Prague the head of the Hungarian government Viktor Orban (Alliance of Young Democrats-Civic Union, FIDESZ-MPP) at the end of last September.

"The question now is whether populist politics will prevail over traditional and more responsible politicians ... ANO is pursuing the kind of populism we find in school textbooks - a strong leader who seeks to divide society and create a tribal identity," ponders Tomas Lebeda, professor of political science at Palacky University in Olomouc.

A few days ago, the international Pandora Papers scandal revealed that the Czech Prime Minister had used €15 million from his offshore companies to finance the purchase of a property in France in 2009. Andrej Babis has denied all allegations against him. According to Otto Eibl, the Pandora Papers revelations did not particularly influence the Czech vote: "There were

so many corruption cases that many voters became insensitive to them," he said.

"The real estate agency advised me to buy this property through a lawyer, there was nothing illegal about that," said Andrej Babis, who said the purchase predated his entry into politics. "A politician cannot afford such a thing, but I made this transaction twelve years ago," he stressed.

According to the outgoing Prime Minister, ANO has achieved *"an excellent result"* in the face of a major rebellion orchestrated by the opposition parties. Milos Zeman repeated during the election campaign that he considered party coalitions as *"a scam against the voters"*.

"Our party is the strongest. I will propose to Together to form a government with me," said Andrej Babis, who can no longer rely on his former left-wing allies

(his partner in the outgoing government, the Social Democratic Party, and its supporter in the Chamber of Deputies, the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia). Moreover, the result of Freedom and Direct Democracy, below 10% of the vote, makes any alliance unthinkable.

"We will see what the President of the Republic will say... I am a manager, my place is in the government," declared Andrej Babis.

Milos Zeman, who has always said that he would entrust the leader of the winning party to form the next government, nevertheless chose to receive the outgoing Prime Minister Andrej Babis at Lany Castle, the summer residence of the Czech presidents. *"Milos Zeman will do his best to keep ANO in power,"* said Josef Mlejnek of Charles University in Prague.

You can read all of our publications on our site :

www.robert-schuman.eu

Publishing Director : Pascale JOANNIN

THE FONDATION ROBERT SCHUMAN, created in 1991 and acknowledged by State decree in 1992, is the main French research centre on Europe. It develops research on the European Union and its policies and promotes the content of these in France , Europe and abroad. It encourages, enriches and stimulates European debate thanks to its research, publications and the organisation of conferences. The Foundation is presided over by Mr. Jean-Dominique Giuliani