

Political Preferences

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Petr Kaniok
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**THE CZECH REPUBLIC 2014 EUROPEAN
PARLIAMENT ELECTION:
VOTERS GONE OUT, NEW PARTIES IN**

Abstract:

This article describes and evaluates 2014 Czech European Parliament (EP) election. Starting with the context of the election, it goes through all relevant party actors participating in the election and introduces them both in general ideological terms as well as in relation towards the European integration. After results of election are discussed, the article concludes that 2014 EP election confirmed recent changes in the Czech party system – inter alia destabilization of the system as a whole, reconfiguration on its right wing and emergence of populism. Concerning the European message of the election, their results confirmed their second-order character.

Key words:

EP election 2014, Czech Republic, ANO 2011, party system, second order elections, ODS

Introduction

Czech Republic became a member of the EU in 2004 as a part of the biggest wave in the history of EU enlargement. Completion of accession process meant that the popular and simple slogan “Return to the Europe” connected with it was not valid anymore – Czech Republic was back on track and instead of dreaming about all positive values associated with the “West” the country had to start a process of “being EU member”. This active membership can be inter alia operationalized as participation in the EU political system – e. g. through EP elections.

Both EP elections that took part in the Czech Republic in 2004 and in 2009 [Hloušek, Kaniok 2014] did not bring a lot of positive news regarding this participation. Czech voters as well as Czech politicians followed the same approach and the same bad habits that have characterized EP elections in old

member states since 1979 – low turnout, low media coverage, domestic content, second or even third order candidates. What is interesting, both 2004 and 2009 Czech EP elections were framed very specifically – the former took part just one month after EU accession and the later was held within the Czech EU Council Presidency. Thus, the 2014 EP election was from this perspective first “normal” EP election as it was not affected by any important EU related event as in the previous cases. However, as this analysis reveals, it made no substantial difference – also the 2014 followed the same second order election pattern [Reif, Schmitt 1980] as in 2004 and 2009.

The analysis proceeds as follows. First, as the Czech politics has been very turbulent in recent years, domestic context of the election is briefly introduced. After that, all relevant parties that run the election are characterized in terms of their ideology and approach towards the EU. This part particularly focuses on ANO 2011 and Dawn of Direct Democracy, two newcomers in the Czech party politics. Third part of the analysis is devoted to the electoral campaign; fourth section discusses the results of the election. Conclusion of the analysis pays attention particularly possible implications of the election for the Czech EU policy and Czech party system.

Domestic context before the election

It is very difficult to briefly sum up and characterize domestic political situation in the Czech Republic before 2014 EP elections. A lot of things have changed in recent years, both in terms of structures and relevant actors. Starting with the latter, during five years that elapsed from 2009 EP elections Czech party landscape almost completely transformed – something that had not been expected as the Czech Republic had been seen as quite stable party system whose core poles had been established already in 90’s [Havlík, Kopeček 2008: 188]. However, voting down Topolánek EU Presidency government in March 2009 started process when several new parties emerged and have persisted, some emerged as comets and in the same way disappeared and some previously key actors became rather marginal players. Almost all relevant parties changed their leaders (some of them not only once), arrival of new parties and political movements introduced new strong figures. Between May 2009 and May 2014 there were acting four different governments, two of them caretakers or semi-caretakers ones. This obvious instability led to three nationwide elections during this period – two of them parliamentary and one presidential.

Last sentence of previous paragraph refers to the most important structural change that affected Czech politics between 2009 and 2014. In 2012, all parliamentary parties agreed on introduction of direct presidential election since

2013 – however, without any changes in presidential power and competences. As the first election that was held in January 2013 won M. Zeman, strong and charismatic former prime minister, influence of presidential office at least informally increased. Despite of having the same position and role within the Czech political system as his indirectly elected predecessors; M. Zeman has become very active and activist president. As good example can be used M. Zeman’s role in forming non-partisan caretaker cabinet in summer 2013. Government that replaced coalition cabinet of Civic Democrats (ODS), Tradition-Responsibility-Prosperity 09 (TOP 09) and Liberal Democrats (LIDEM)¹ resigning in June 2013 was led by J. Rusnok, close ally of M. Zeman. This government in majority consisting of former Social Democrats and allies of M. Zeman, was initially formed against the will of fragile but still existing centre right majority in the House of Deputies – ODS, TOP 09 and LIDEM possessed 101 from 200 seats. However, M. Zeman, when designating J. Rusnok as new prime minister, said, that he “could not disappoint voters who had supported him in the presidential elections with promise to stop Nečas government”. Although Rusnok’s government did not succeed in the vote of confidence, it led the country until end of January 2014 when new government, following results of early parliamentary election held in October 2013, was formed [Hloušek, Kaniok 2014].

Results of early parliamentary election of 2013 confirmed tendencies that had been indicated already in election of 2010. Results of both elections (including distribution of seats and differences between 2010 and 2013) can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1. Overview of results of parliamentary elections of 2010 and 2013 (House of Deputies)

Party	2010		2013	
	Votes (%)	Seats	Votes (%)	Seats (+/-)
Social Democrats (ČSSD)	22.09	56	20.45	50 (-6)
Civic Democrats (ODS)	20.22	53	7.72	16 (-37)
Tradition-Responsibility-Prosperity 09 (TOP 09)	16.71	41	11.99	26 (-15)
Communists (KSČM)	11.27	26	14.91	33 (+7)
Public Affairs (VV)	10.88	24		
Christian Democrats (KDU-ČSL)	4.39	0	6.78	14 (+14)
Action of Dissatisfied Citizens (ANO 2011)		-	18.65	47 (+47)
Dawn of Direct Democracy (Úsvit)		-	6.88	14 (+14)
Others	14.44	-	12.62	-

Source: Czech Statistical Office [www.volby.cz].

¹ LIDEM was a small party existing only between as a result of internal tensions within Public Affairs (VV).

Last parliamentary election pointed out three interesting trends which had been already indicated in 2010 or earlier. Firstly, the 2013 election confirmed presence and increasing support for populism in the Czech politics. In 2010 election this phenomenon was emphasized by Public Affairs party (VV)² which based its campaign on wiping out political dinosaurs and strong anti-corruption ethos. Ironically, VV very soon adopted the same practices it had criticized and splitted due to internal tensions in 2012 [Havlík, Hloušek 2014]. In 2013 total amount of voters dissatisfied with established major actors (as Social Democrats and Civic Democrats) substantially increased, because new parties with populist or slightly populist rhetoric (ANO 2011 and The Dawn) got almost 1/3 of parliamentary seats.

Secondly, both Social Democrats and Civic Democrats, two key players in Czech party system since 1996 (and in case of ODS since 1992), continued their withdrawal from leading positions. While in all elections between 1996 and 2006 these two parties together secured majority of seats, in 2010 election became their decline which in 2013 continued. While ČSSD can still be considered as major force in Czech party system, ODS has become only one of its ordinal members.

Thirdly, ODS cannot be labelled a major right wing party anymore. For long time was dominant position of ODS at this part of party scene seen as granted for ever, but emergence of TOP 09 in 2009 started to complicate things – which was illustrated in 2010 election and confirmed in 2013 when TOP 09 took a leading role. Thus, the question that has been relevant in 2014 changed from trying to identify the strongest right wing party to estimating whether ODS can survive as relevant actor at all.

There could be probably found another interesting news brought by the 2013 election (as, e. g., comeback of Christian Democrats into the House of Deputies, low turnout etc.), but the most important one was establishment of new government. Problematic semi caretaker cabinet of J. Rusnok was replaced by coalition government consisting of ČSSD, KDU-ČSL and ANO 2011. Composition of government followed election results – ČSSD got 8 seats (including Prime Minister B. Sobotka), ANO 2011 6 seats and KDU-ČSL 3 seats. New cabinet succeeded in vote of confidence in the mid of February 2014 with 110 votes for, 38 against and 33 abstaining.

Timing of the early election as well as establishment of new cabinet obviously affected character of EP election. As both important domestic events happened very close to the start of the campaign, opposition could not profit from typical second order elections features [Reif, Schmitt 1980] – EP elections are usually held in the mid of parliamentary term, voters usually tend to support

² Interesting analysis of VV as a business party provides article by Hloušek [2012].

opposition than governing parties etc. It was thus obvious that composition of the Czech EP delegation will be substantially altered after the election – both in terms of parties and individual MEP. Table 2 offers an overview of 2009 EP election in terms of parties' gains.

Table 2. EP election 2009

Party	Votes (%)	MEPs	EP party group
Civic Democrats (ODS)	31.35	9	ECR
Social Democrats (ČSSD)	22.39	7	S&D
Communists (KSČM)	14.18	4	GUE-NGL
Christian Democrats (KDU-ČSL)	7.65	2	EPP
Others	24.43	0	-

Source: Czech Statistical Office [www.volby.cz].

Parties participating in the EP election

There were altogether 39 lists which were registered for the EP election – however, strong majority of them without having real chance to reach 5 % threshold from the beginning of the campaign. Among these “political dwarfs” could have been found traditional outsiders as Czech Monarchists or Right Block of former dissident P. Cibulka, colourful mix of extremist and small Eurosceptic parties as No to Brussels – National Democracy or ambitious but only to big cities intellectuals appealing projects as Liberal Ecological Party.

Among relevant parties could have been counted all four traditional parties that have been parliamentary represented (for the whole period or for its substantial part) in the House of Commons since 1992 – ČSSD, ODS, KSČM and KDU-ČSL. These four parties have not only formed the core of Czech party system, but have been in various configurations also responsible for executive power. Except of them, TOP 09, Action of Dissatisfied Citizens (ANO 2011), Dawn of Direct Democracy (The Dawn) could have believed in good results as all three parties succeeded in last parliamentary election. There were also several potential “black horses” which might have done a breakthrough – Eurosceptical Party of Free Citizens (SSO), Czech Pirate Party and The Greens.

Czech Social Democrats belongs among few major socialistic/social democratic parties in the Central and Eastern Europe which has not its origin in the former communist parties – ČSSD refers both to the tradition of inter-war Czechoslovakian Social Democracy as well to the Social Democracy existing during communist regime in exile. The party is firmly grounded in modern socialist ideology being inspired itself by West European social democratic

parties. Its position towards the European integration is continuously strongly positive – there is no major Eurosceptic camp of fraction within the party.

ODS was for the long time the second pillar of Czech modern party system – from 1996 to 2010 each elections were competition particularly between ODS and ČSSD as no other party could have attacked first place. After fall of Nečas government in 2013 ODS substantially declined and its leading position in the right wing of party system (and leading position in the party system as a whole) disappeared. It was not only due to the scandals of last ODS led cabinet, image and reputation of party was for a long time affected by corruption scandals of its local politicians, weak leadership and internal quarrels – Klíma argues that ODS denegerated itself into a new type of political party, that he identifies as “clientelistic party” [Klíma 2013]. In terms of ideology, ODS is usually described in ideological terms as a moderate conservative [Cabada, Hloušek, Jurek 2014: 93] or conservative-liberal subject [Havlík 2011: 134]. The party is labelled in relation to European integration as Eurosceptic or soft Eurosceptic [Houghton 2009: 1371-1392, Hanley 2008].

Third strong key actor of Czech party system is the Communist party. Its role and existence constitutes another unique feature of Czech system – Communists neither changed their name, nor never fully cut themselves off from the legacy of Communist party of Czechoslovakia. Thus the party partly has been for a long time living on collecting protest votes and on nostalgia after the former communist regime. As such, KSČM have never been a part of an executive coalition since the foundation of the Czech Republic [Cabada, Hloušek, Jurek 2014: 93]. Concerning party’s EU profile, Czech Communists have been traditionally criticizing the European integration from various perspective – taking into account both political and economic shortcomings of the EU.

As well as ČSSD and KSČM, also history and tradition of Czech Christian Democrats can be traced down to the inter war period. Ideologically, the KDU-CSL reports to the political centre and is described as part of the Christian-democratic party family [Hanley 2010: 115-133]. In modern Czech history, the Christian Democrats have traditionally played a role of “pivotal” party, cooperating in various periods and various cabinets either with the Social Democrats or with the ODS. In 2010 parliamentary election the Christian Democrats paid for several years lasting weak leadership³ and subsequent secession of substantial part of electorate, party members and party elites, did not come over 5% threshold and thus lost its parliamentary representation. However, only after one term, KDU-ČSL returned back into the House of Deputies. Concerning EU, Czech Christian democrats perceive European integration as a good thing and in principle they support it in both its economic and political dimension [Havlík 2009: 82-87].

³ During the period 1998-2009 the party leaders changed 6 times [Hloušek, Kopeček 2010: 144].

Tradition-Responsibility-Prosperity 09 was the first results of disintegration of Czech party system after 2009. The party was founded by several prominent former Christian Democrats (as e. g. M. Kalousek), but succeed in gaining popular and influential politicians and persons also from other “camps” – the most typical example of this is current and so far the only party leader K. Schwarzenberg, before TOP 09 foundation associated with The Greens⁴. As important and strategic factor seems to be TOP 09 close cooperation with political movement called “The Mayors and Independents” that organizes successful local and regional politicians. After existing for more than 5 years, TOP 09 aspires to be leading party on the right wing of Czech party system, where it tries to adopt moderate conservative and strongly pro-European stances.

Last parliamentary election brought two newcomers among Czech relevant parties. The history of the first of these, ANO 2011, started in autumn 2011. One of the leading Czech businessmen operating in the chemical and food industries A. Babiš, initiated the foundation of the “Action by Discontented Citizens” political movement, which was registered officially by the Czech Ministry of Interior in 2012 as the political movement “ANO 2011”. Roughly 17,000 citizens signed the movement’s original petition in November and December 2011, supporting a protest voice raised by Babiš against the political elite. The organisational structures of the movement were, however, only minimally developed during 2012 and the first half of 2013 because A. Babiš, who has been the head of the movement since the very beginning, concentrated his efforts on organising his weekly newspaper 5+2, and later on to investing in and buying leading quality media; this led to his occasionally-used nickname of “the Czech Berlusconi”. The activities of the movement increased prior to the 2013 early parliamentary elections 2013. Babiš succeeded in engaging some popular political as well as non-political figures to back his movement. ANO 2011 pumped lots of money (provided mainly by the different companies of Agrofert Holding, owned by Babiš) into the campaign and this, together with a perfect political marketing strategy and a brief „protest” manifesto focusing on corruption, catapulted this newcomer without any previous significant political impact to the position of the second largest parliamentary club. Still it was unclear what the programmatic priorities of his party would be, because A. Babiš most typical answer of to any question related to his movement’s precise positioning on any given issue was something like “I have to ask the experts”. It was even difficult to assess the movement’s exact position on the left-right spectrum. We can undoubtedly say that ANO 2011 did not represent

⁴ As another similar “purchase” can be pointed out Jiří Pospíšil, before January 2014 member of ODS and former Minister of Justice. Pospíšil was ranked among most popular politicians and left ODS after he had not succeeded at party congress in January 2014.

the political left, but it was also difficult to say that the party's programme fitted with what one might call the "typical" political right. However, the tycoon's rhetoric against traditional "lazy" politicians (who certainly knew how to run large businesses) proved to be impressive in eyes of many Czech voters.

Evaluation of the Dawn of Direct Democracy party's position was a much easier. The party was on the far-right of the Czech party system, not inevitably extremist but approaching some issues in ways close to political extremism, such as its stance on the role of Roma in society. The political movement, the full name of which read the "Dawn of Direct Democracy of Tomio Okamura" was founded at the beginning of 2013 by the Senator and aspiring Czech presidential candidate T. Okamura [Kaniok, Hloušek 2013]. The movement was registered as late as June 2013, yet was still able to recruit supporters, leaders and candidates for the early election in October. The main message of the Movement - under whose umbrella, incidentally, some politicians from the Public Affairs Party found a new political home, was clear from the very beginning. T. Okamura supported a substantial switch from representative to direct democracy (including popular recall of politicians at all levels of decision making) as a panacea for everything that was wrong with Czech politics. Beyond this surface, however, many extremist undertones could be heard such as Okamura's support for creation of "the Roma state". All accusations of racism were fended off with a single argument that, as a man of Czech-Japanese origin, T. Okamura simply could not be a racist. Observing the positioning of Okamura and his movement, we can, however, conclude that he was to fill the niche of the "missing" relevant party on the Czech far-right.

There were also three parties which in various pre-election polls balanced around 5% threshold. Party of Free Citizens tried to address Eurosceptical voters as the party was originally founded as mainly (but not only) Eurosceptical party [Kaniok 2014]. On specific group targeted also Czech Pirate Party (ČPS) while The Greens believed that EP election could help them to restart their political relevance.

Election campaign

EP election 2014 campaign was probably the least visible and interesting campaign in modern nation-wide elections held in the Czech Republic. It does not mean that both the parties and media ignored the election, but the intensity (number billboards, ads, meetings, TV debates etc.). Probably only those people who were really interested in politics and in European integration and of course, the politicians themselves, did really care.

Such picture is hardly surprising. European elections were never popular in the Czech Republic, which in both previous cases (2004 and 2009) have

traditionally followed pan-European patterns: very low turnout, second-rate candidates and a strong preference for domestic issues over the European ones. And, as already mentioned, Czech voters are being asked to attend their third elections at national level in 16 months. In January 2013 they voted for their first directly elected president and last October there was an early parliamentary election.

Going through party manifestos and main issues they tried to emphasize, one can simply sum up that general valence statements and empty slogans prevailed [Havlík 2014]. Concerning governmental parties, it was sometimes very difficult to distinguish among them, especially in the case of ANO 2011 and ČSSD. Starting with ČSSD, the party emphasised especially social issues, trying to capture voters' interests by saying 'Together in Europe'. In addition, the party wanted 'to play the first fiddle in Europe'. Similarly, ANO 2011 published a manifesto full of vague statements best expressed by the main slogan 'For Our Children to Have a Chance in Europe'. Only KDU-ČSL slightly differed as the party bet on motto 'We Protect the Czech Interests'. However, also Christian Democrats did not fall behind the previous two governmental parties in vagueness and emptiness.

The opposition camp did not deliver any substantial message as well. TOP 09 tried to present itself as a clearly pro-European party (a slogan 'I am a European' under the picture of K. Schwarzenberg clearly expresses the positive attitude of the party towards the EU) and persuaded the voters about the importance of the EU with the slogan 'Don't give up on Europe'. The main issue of the ODS campaign and manifesto was the rejection of the entrance of the Czech Republic to the European Monetary Union and criticizing of the European Parliament and its power. The party organised a petition against the euro during the campaign and managed to collect more than 40 000 signatures. KSČM did not invest much effort and money into the campaign and relied on its usually much disciplined voters – the Communists did the same as they had done in 2004 and 2009 EP elections. Some media attention (even abroad) got the anti-immigration campaign ran by the Dawn. The party 'borrowed' a well-known sheep poster first used by the Swiss People's Party.

Concerning non-parliamentary parties, the most visible campaign was run by the SSO. The main message of SSO was criticizing of – in SSO words 'Euro-nonsenses' including not only the euro but also, for example, the regulation of bulbs or flushing of toilets. Both the Greens and ČPS were not able to find any similar simple message and they probably hoped that voters would vote for changes and new faces.

Except of looking into the party manifestos and their headlines, it is also interesting to evaluate them on the basis of standardized coding. Kaniok and Havlík [2014] did so following the Euromanifestos⁵ project's codebook which

⁵ Euromanifestos project is run by Mannheim Centre for European Social Research (MZES).

divides codes among eight policy domains⁶ and three levels of governance⁷. Following the policy domains, parties considered as the most important issues those connected to the economy. Political topics (political system in general and political system of the EU) as well as issues connected with human right or external policies were downplayed. In this sense, relevant parties stressed the same topics (and policy agendas) that were important in the case of 2013 parliamentary election. As Kaniok and Havlík [2014] identified, parties preferred the European level of governance as a governmental frame. This not that surprising finding, because even 2004 and 2009 euromanifestos can be described as Europeanized [Kovář 2013]. However, presence of Europeanization (e. g. in sense of preference of EU governmental frame) tells nothing about quality and consistency of euromanifestos.

Perhaps more interesting than the content emptiness of campaign were the candidates standing in the election. Among the most prominent could have been found P. Telička, former Chief Negotiator for Czech EU accession and former Member of the European Commission who led ANO 2011 list. When choosing candidates, A. Babiš party tried to confirm its non-party and expert self-characterization as the list consisted mainly of diplomats, lobbyists and EU specialists – no prominent politician were present. The same strategy, at least at level of leaders, was adopted also by ČSSD (list led by sociologist J. Keller) and TOP 09 (leader L. Niedermayer, former vice governor of the Czech National Bank). The rest of parties combined experienced and young politicians as their leaders. While the former was the case of ODS (MEP J. Zahradil) and KDU-ČSL (former minister P. Svoboda), the latter strategy adopted probably surprisingly KSČM (young and quite attractive Member of House of Deputies K. Konečná).

All in all, the campaign preceding the election was hardly visible, lacking any contentious issues. As already mentioned, voters were fed up with politics on one hand and they do not have many incentives to show change of their preferences that shortly after the parliamentary election. And there was clear shortage on the supply side as well. Parties were financially exhausted by the previous campaigns and they could not pump much money to keep voters engaged. The ruling parties were consumed more with their intra-governmental agenda and disputes. On the other hand, the opposition was very fragmented and obviously needed some recovery from heavy loss in October 2013 parliamentary election.

In the framework of the project all euromanifestos in the period between first EP election (1979) and EP election of 2009 were coded.

⁶ These domains are: External Relations (EXT), Freedom and Democracy (FD), Political System (PS), Political System of the EU (PSEU), Economy (ECO), Welfare and Quality of Life (WQL), Fabric of Society (FS), Social Groups (SG). In original coding, domain Economy is divided into two domains (Economic Goals, Economic Structure).

⁷ These levels are National, European, Global/Other.

Election

Compared with the pre-election polls, the results (which are displayed in Table 4) brought some surprising results. Firstly, polls expected that ANO 2011 would have won with greater difference than it did. Secondly, support for TOP 09 had been estimated as substantially lower than was party results. Thirdly, ČSSD as well as ANO 2011 should have according polls got more than 20 % of votes. Polls also underestimated support for SSO and for the Christian Democrats.

Table 3. EP election 2014

Party	Votes (%)	MEPs (+/-)	EP party group
Action of Dissatisfied Citizens (ANO 2011)	16.13	4 (+4)	ALDE
Tradition-Responsibility-Prosperity 09 (TOP 09)	15.95	4 (+4)	EPP
Social Democrats (ČSSD)	14.17	4 (-3)	S&D
Communists (KSČM)	10.98	3 (-1)	GUE-NGL
Christian Democrats (KDU-ČSL)	9.95	3 (+1)	EPP
Civic Democrats (ODS)	7.67	2 (-7)	ECR
Party of Free Citizens (SSO)	5.24	1 (+1)	EFDD
Others	19.91		-

Source: Czech Statistical Office [www.volby.cz].

The election brought a narrow victory for ANO 2011, which can lead to a twofold interpretation. Taking into account that the party was new, winning the election and acquiring four seats in the EP can be sold as big success. However, as the party had counted with triumph and at least 7 MEPs, it was at the same time bitter victory. TOP 09, which ended as the runner-up, can be seen as the real winner of the election. The party was expected to be third at the best, acquired also 4 seats in the EP and was beaten by ANO 2011 with marginal difference. On the other hand, three MEPs elected for TOP 09 were non-partisan candidates⁸, and one represented movement The Mayors and Independents – that casts some doubts on personal policy of TOP 09 and points out to obvious shortage of its own cadres.

ČSSD and its leaders probably shared the same feelings as ANO 2011 did. Having taken into consideration the traditionally low discipline of social democratic voters, internal quarrels that occurred after the parliamentary election, 14.17 % of votes (and four seats) can be interpreted as a success for ČSSD. However, the same number can be very convincingly interpreted as sign of continuing decline of ČSSD support. KSČM ended on the fourth place, closely followed by KDU-ČSL. While the former lost one MEP – which was

⁸ Luděk Niedermayer, Jiří Pospíšil and Jaromír Štětina.

hardly success – the later party confirmed its comeback among relevant forces. Only 7.7% of voters cast their votes for ODS which meant a decrease of support of the party by more than 20 percentage points since the 2009 EP election. On the other, no one (including rational party politicians) had expected substantially better outcome after 2013 parliamentary election. Party of Free Citizens, with 5.24 % of votes and one seat for the leader of the party Petr Mach, was the last political party that managed to pass the threshold. Only several thousands of voters lacked ČPS (4.78 %) to pass the threshold while The Greens and The Dawn ended with only 3.77% and 3.12 % of votes respectively.

As expected, the election substantially changed the composition of Czech national EP delegation. Only 6 MEPs were re-elected, which represents the biggest change in the Czech MEPs composition so far. This earthquake was caused not only by success of new parties, but also by simple fact that many of MEPs elected for term 2009-2014 had not been either successful in party primaries, or had not stood for the election at all. Among new MEPs we can find many apolitical figures coming from diplomatic circles or persons lacking substantial experience with European politics.

Conclusions

It would be very risky to say that 2014 EP election had some direct and visible impact on Czech politics or that it delivered some substantial changes. Election as a whole (not only its results) rather confirmed already existing tendencies and trend both in Czech party system and in the Czech European policy.

Starting with the former, it is obvious that Czech party system is changing and unstable. Even if ANO 2011 confirmed its success from 2013 parliamentary election, its position within the system is not unshakable. As history of VV and failure of The Dawn in 2014 EP election show, Czech new parties – especially when based upon strong leader – can have very short life or perform very differently. Particularly the very future of ANO 2011 represents one big query. Will ANO 2011 transform itself into party that will be leading force in the right wing camp? Will it be able to generate more stronger and visible leaders than A. Babiš? Second question mark can be spotted above existing right wing parties – after EP election there are three of them: TOP 09, ODS and SSO. All these parties (plus ANO 2011) compete in many aspects about similar voters; on the other hand they differ substantially in various agendas. Anyway, all these players can hardly survive even in the medium term perspective. Compared to the right wing camp, left wing part of the party system seems to be relatively stable.

Results of EP election confirmed and probably deepened overall dissatisfaction of Czech voters with performance not only with Czech parties,

but perhaps with the whole political system. Constant support for political forces which apparently portray themselves as “non-parties” (ANO 2011) or support for new parties (SSO) was in the case of EP election accompanied with candidacy of non-politicians and non-party members (J. Keller, P. Telička and whole ANO 2011 list, L. Niedermayer etc.) and growing support for them. This phenomenon may be dangerous for the political system as a whole if prevailing – it may mean that parties resign on their elite production function and thus their role in the political system.

Concerning Czech European policy, 2014 election confirmed that EU doesn't matter much in the Czech Republic. This applies not only for parties, politicians and media, but for the voters as well. The turnout record of 18.2 % was more than 10 percentage points lower than in 2009 which made the Czech voters the second lowest willing to vote in whole EU. It is also questionable how successful will newly elected MEPs be. As majority of them lack experience with the EU and have not so far established network of contacts not only within the EP, it will take some time before they are able to conduct any real politics. On the other hand, there is also one possibly positive outcome of the election. New MEPs could change existing perception of the Czech Republic as Eurosceptic country. Compared to the previous two EP elections, support for both soft and hard Eurosceptic parties (ODS, KSČM, SSO) decreased – there is obvious majority of at least declaratorily pro-European MEPs in current Czech EP delegation.

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EUROPEAN ELECTIONS IN CROATIA

Abstract:

This text discusses the results of European elections in Croatia. It reaches the conclusion that voters, unhappy with the economic situation, punished the ruling social democratic coalition which suffered a heavy defeat. On the other hand, election results prove the recovery of HDZ, the opposition, centre-right party. It is also obvious that most Croatian citizens do not believe that European elections are important enough to warrant voting. Euroscepticism in Croatia is on the rise because citizens see no obvious benefits from joining the European Union. On the contrary, it is becoming increasingly clear that, in its first year as a member, Croatia will pay more funds into EU budget than it will receive from it. It is evident that direct elections of European Parliament members did not succeed in strengthening EU's legitimacy in the eyes of Croatian voters, and that European elections are actually of secondary importance.

Key words:

European elections, Croatia, European Union, Euroscepticism

In Croatia, like in most other European Union member states, elections for the European Parliament attracted little public interest. One gets the impression that even major political parties did not put enough energy into informing voters about the importance of their participation in the European elections. The key question of why would someone even bother to vote in the European elections was not answered, neither by Croatian political parties nor non-governmental institutions. The answer they gave to this and other similar questions was only a general phrase that European elections were "very important". Those who put a little more effort into it pointed out that around 50% of legislation that has a direct bearing on Croatian citizens is adopted in the European Parliament. Which legislation are we talking about? Why is it important? What