

A stylized world map composed of a grid of grey dots, with several dots highlighted in red to represent specific countries or regions.

## Czech Republic: From Post-Communist Idealism to Economic Populism

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- Although current political developments are often related to the mismanaged post-communist transformation, they are also determined by the way post-communist countries were integrated into the global economy.
- We have witnessed the erosion of traditional political parties in the Czech Republic. This erosion was not framed in the language of cultural or political exceptionalism, such as illiberal democracy, but using the vocabulary of managerial and economic technocracy.
- Although disappointment with democratisation is often blamed for the current mobilisation of populist leaders in Central-Eastern Europe, it is unclear whether this tendency can be seen only as a region-specific mechanism or whether we are entering a period characterised by a more general trend of growing support for anti-liberal and antidemocratic forces across the globe. This paper tends to argue the latter.
- While there are three forms of populism in the Czech Republic (left-wing, right-wing and centrist varieties), the centrist managerial populism of Andrej Babiš is dominant.
- To defeat the new radical populism in its many variations, the democratic left needs to articulate the interests that populists articulate, but to do so in a way that differs from them. In general, there is a need for a new political language that helps progressive and inclusive political forces to articulate the substantiated fears of globalisation's losers. The democratic left needs to formulate a globalisation with a human face.



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## Introduction

At the beginning of transition, the expectations of future developments were high in the country; in general, support for a market economy and democracy exceeded that in Western countries in the early post-communist period in Central Eastern Europe (Barnes 1998). This pool of trust and future expectations created an open opportunity space for transformation policies, but these also brought a new type of hardship for some parts of the population. In the early days of transition, these hardships never translated into a wave of anti-regime protest and/or massive support for non-democratic or illiberal forces. It was not until after 2008 that protest reaction emerged across the region, the Czech Republic included (Beissinger and Sasse 2014). In the Czech Republic it was a reaction to the austerity policies introduced in response to the perceived dangers of the financial and economic crisis (Čísař and Navrátil 2015).

After this crisis, significant political changes followed across the region. Some political scientists even talk about a hollowing and backsliding of democracy in East Central Europe in the period following the accession of these countries to the European Union in 2004 (Greskovits 2015). Although these developments are very often related to the mismanaged post-communist transformation, they are also determined by the way post-communist countries were integrated into the global economy. Moreover, this chapter will argue that the particular form taken by the protest response against globalisation is connected to the way in which the main lines of political conflict are structured in the Czech Republic compared to other countries in the region.

In terms of political conflict, Czech politics has been dominated by the economic left-right division which has traditionally structured the country's party politics. As a result, the main politically-articulated issues have concerned the economy and welfare. These are the issues that political parties have articulated in their struggle for political power, and they have consequently played the biggest role in creating opposing political camps in Czech politics. Cultural issues, articulated either by progressive or conservative forces, have been secondary for the mainstream parties, and are often voiced outside the parliamentary arena by means of protest politics (Čísař and Vráblíková 2016). In addition, after the accession to

the EU they have been voiced by the successors to Václav Havel in the post of Czech President, Václav Klaus and Miloš Zeman.

In this respect, the Czech Republic differs from Poland and above all from Hungary, which have been dominated by the prevalence of sociocultural issues (Rovny and Edwards 2012). Consequently, although we have also witnessed the erosion of traditional political parties in the Czech Republic (similarly to Poland and Hungary), it has assumed a different form. This erosion has not been framed in the language of cultural or political exceptionalism, such as illiberal democracy, but in the vocabulary of managerial and economic technocracy. Populism mostly means something different in the Czech Republic compared to other countries of Central Eastern Europe. Concretely, Babiš symbolizes a certain type of *economic populism* (see also below).

Open cultural resistance to the political mainstream has so far been marginal in the country; it has mostly manifested itself outside parliamentary politics. It also concerns the current period and is probably due to the fact that regarding cultural issues, such as the refugee crisis, there is consent among the political elite *across the political spectrum*, which convenes on a restrictive position. At times, mainstream politicians such as Zeman and Babiš express this position openly and, especially before elections (such as the regional elections in autumn 2016), in a very insulting way.

From the temporal perspective, we can see three consecutive periods in the development of the country's politics and economy. Since transformation has been understood as a process of double transition from communism to democracy and from a centrally-planned to a market economy, this chapter looks at the development of both in the form of the national political economy (see also Myant and Drahokoupil 2010). This development can be summarised as follows:

*First*, there was the period of democratic capitalism the Czech way, a model that can be described as nationally-regulated capitalism. The initial period of post-communist development in Czechoslovakia and later the Czech Republic was defined by such an arrangement (Stark and Bruszt 1998; Myant 2003). *Second*, there is the globalised model of capitalism which is integrated into the network of global economic exchanges and internation-

alised politics. This model applies to the second period of Czech post-communist development, which started in the late 1990s (Myant 2003; Drahoukoupil 2008). This economic globalisation occurred in conjunction with the country's political Europeanisation in the run-up to EU accession. *Third*, there is the globalised model of capitalism that embraces the ideological discourse of neoliberalism. The third period of Czech capitalism's development after 2006 fits this model (Saxonberg and Sirovátka 2014). It is also a period both of major international crises and political reshuffling in the country, most often interpreted as a reaction to disappointment at the previous post-communist developments in politics and the economy. This paper offers a somewhat different view.

## Survey of Developments in Czech Political Economy

While in Hungary and Poland the issues of welfare and distribution were much less central to political conflict than nationalism vs. liberalism, in the Czech Republic welfare and the economy played the most important structuring role in party competition (Whitefield and Rohrschneider 2009: 676). In the Czech Republic, a socioeconomic cleavage became the main conflict line in the new democratic party politics soon after 1989 and it has remained so ever since (Kopecký 2007: 120, Mansfeldová 2013: 221). This reflects the general value consensus in the country, which differentiates it from both Hungary and Poland. Since the country seemingly shared basic liberal and pro-European values, party mobilisation centred on economic issues; challengers of this cultural consensus were forced to occupy fairly marginal positions. Unlike in Hungary and Poland, they have never entered the government.

If we look at the whole period of post-communism, we may conclude that the main issues articulated in the field of party politics in the Czech Republic have been economic. Although the Czech Republic was established in 1993 as one of the successor states of the former Czechoslovakia, openly nationalist mobilisation never played a significant role in the country, and all potentially nationalist claims withered away with the partition of the former Czechoslovak federation (Mansfeldová 2013: 234-236). Cultural issues found their place in the extra-institutional protest arena, while economic demands were underrepresented in protests. This mobilisation has

resulted in marginal radical right parties, which based their message on sociocultural issues. They have usually created lines of division along an ethnic basis, between the »Czechs« and »others«, originally the Roma community, more recently immigrants and Muslims.

In Hungary and Poland the situation was exactly the opposite: for instance, while 69 percent of protest events in Hungary in the 1990s and 2000s were related to economic issues, such issues were behind only 16 percent of protests in the Czech Republic (Čisař and Vráblíková 2016: 12). If the party field's main conflict line is an economic left-right one, then extra-institutional collective action driven by economic issues is crowded out (Czech Republic). If the socio-cultural dimension (social conservatism vs. liberalism) is what primarily defines the party field, then economic issues are more represented in the protest field (Hungary).

Although economic conflict defined the political mainstream in the country's post-communist period, it acquired different meanings and different institutional forms in different periods.

### Early Transformation

In the early transformation period, the main issue was the marketisation and stabilisation of the economy. The idea of the return to Europe dominated the political sphere, and was shared by nearly everybody, so there was nothing to discuss with regard to this issue. Instead, the first post-communist elections were dominated by economic arguments advocating the introduction of a liberal economy. Unlike Poland and Hungary, which inherited big international debts from the pre-democratic period and whose transformation strategies were therefore bound by their international dependence, in the Czech Republic the steps in the economic transformation were decided much more locally.

Although the country was positioned within a generally (neo)liberal global economy after communism's collapse (Bruszt and Greskovits 2009), the first period in the development of a market economy in the Czech Republic (Czechoslovakia until 1993) unfolded against a background of broad consensus among political elites on a distinctly Czech approach to new economic challenges (Stark and Bruszt 1998). Czech capitalism arose out of

mixed perspectives and expectations: the neo-classical economic policies pursued by one section of the political elite, the political idea of a »return to Europe«, and social-democratic views on various social problems (Myant 2003). Even if it was largely the advocates of the first perspective, i.e. neoliberals symbolised by Václav Klaus, Finance Minister and later Prime Minister, who steered the initial course of development, the measures and policies that in reality emerged in this period were a broad compromise between all three views. As a result, the reform process was based on a particular national model of development (Bohle and Greskovits 2012: 138–181).

#### The Transformation Model and Its Problems

In Czechoslovakia, the main economic reforms – namely privatisation, liberalisation, restitution, industrial restructuring, and macroeconomic stabilisation – were adopted in the early 1990s under Prime Minister Václav Klaus. Klaus combined ideological support for the free market with active welfare policies; consequently, the resultant model »combined ›social-democratic‹ entitlements (pensions, family protection) and liberal incentives for the middle class (voluntary private pensions and tax breaks)« (Inglot 2009: 77). The Czech currency became fully convertible in 1995; and, in contrast to other post-communist countries and owing to macroeconomic stabilisation policies, the inflation rate did not go through any major fluctuations. However, after the initial economic expansion of the mid-1990s the first recession came in 1996 and 1997, with the subsequent recovery being very slow.

Regarding social conflict, as well as securing social peace through the initial rounds of voucher privatisation (which every adult was entitled to participate in for a symbolic fee), the government actively sought to reach compromises with trade unions via a tripartite mechanism (for a critical discussion, see Ost 2000). During the early 1990s, the Czech state was very open to communication with union representatives; according to some, it is because of this social dialogue that the Czech Republic managed to avoid some of the transformation excesses that affected some other post-communist countries. Consultations with labour unions and employers were maintained throughout the term of the first government led by Václav Klaus (1992-1996). Important policy decisions were made on the basis of prior consultation within the tripartite framework (this »pre-emptive cor-

poratism« broke down only after the mid-1990s). The result was national capitalism »the Czech way«, which at the time was heralded as a *miracle of post-communist transformation* (Stark and Bruszt 1998).

Problems emerged in the second part of the 1990s, with the country's economic slowdown and especially the corruption scandals of Klaus's political party (Civic Democratic Party – ODS), which brought down his second government at the end of 1997. That year was a watershed for both politics and the economy. The country was hit by economic troubles stemming from corrupt exchanges, i.e. non-functioning enterprises obtaining credit through their connections to state-owned banks. It was clear that the domestic model of capitalism building had reached its limits and would not be continued in the future (for a criticism of this argument see Švihlíková 2015). Related political troubles, i.e. party funding scandals, especially in the ODS, caused the previously-mentioned pool of trust in democratic politics and government to become exhausted. Levels of trust would never return to the levels enjoyed in the early 1990s (Linek 2010).

#### Europeanisation and Globalisation

The late 1990s brought the country a different political and economic model, one that was generally internationalised. Politically, the most important development started in 1996 in the form of political integration into the EU through the accession process, which significantly shaped domestic policies towards a more liberal model (Drahokoupil 2008: 122–123, 176–180; Streeck 2014: 103–112). In many policy areas, new standards were introduced through the adoption of *acquis communautaire*. The country became a member of the European Union in 2004. This step was generally supported by the population (77.33 per cent of voters supported the accession in the 2003 general referendum, turnout was 55.21 per cent; according to Eurobarometer, in autumn 2004 52 per cent of Czechs tended to trust the EU), and it was understood as the fulfilment of the main transformation goal formulated at the beginning of the 1990s, i.e. the return to Europe.

In terms of economics, a new model of political economy started to develop at the end of the first decade of post-communist transformation. The Czech Social Democratic Party won the 1998 elections and effectively helped es-

establish a much more globalised political economy. Paradoxically, it was the social democrats who introduced this global form of capitalism into the country with the institutional underpinning it required, although probably any political force would have acted in the same way at the time (see Drahoukoupil 2008). Moreover, as soon as the accession referendum (2003) was over, the social democratic government prepared and implemented a plan of restrictive fiscal reform in anticipation of adopting the Euro (see Bohle and Greskovits 2012: 175). By 2004 a »European« model of capitalism had replaced the »Czech version« (Myant 2003: 118).

Although the new government originally aimed to introduce a more *étatiste* vision of economic management compared to the declared neoliberal programme of the previous governments (even though that programme was never fulfilled), it soon found itself in a difficult situation: major banks in collapse, a sharp decline in credit in the economy, and generally poor economic performance. As a consequence, government policies prioritised the sale of non-privatised, »economically unhealthy« or even vulnerable and poorly managed companies, including banks, to foreign buyers. The government also started to attract foreign investors through active investment incentives (see Drahoukoupil 2008: 115–123; Myant and Drahoukoupil 2010).

There was a shift away from the prevailing model of »pre-emptive corporatism«, (in which the interests of employees were taken into account in order to prevent protests and social instability) as the membership and bargaining power of trade unions steadily declined and the domestic class of managers and owners started to be replaced by established multinational companies (Myant 2003). The new management had much more room for manoeuvre: trade unions were less and less able to organise within the newly-established and externally-managed corporations, whilst the service sector grew in strength and the willingness of employees in general to join trade unions declined.

### European Crises and Domestic Post-transition Politics

By the early 2000s, both the manufacturing industry and the service sector had been privatised and all the major banks were owned by international financial cor-

porations. The Czech Republic now had one of the most open economies in the world. It was predominantly driven by foreign direct investment and was dependent on international trade, with Germany as its most important trade partner (Draxler 2014). Accordingly, the country was not as severely affected by the Great Recession (2007–2009) as some other former communist countries (of course, this holds under the general conditions of external dependency and low wages among other negative characteristics; see Noelke and Vliegthart 2009 on the economic dependency of post-communist East Central European countries); however, the perceived threat of a recession significantly impacted local politics and government policies.

Seven months after the 2006 elections a centre-right coalition painfully emerged, in which the ODS, Klaus' old party, was the senior member. The government followed a clearly neoliberal strategy and used the threat of an alleged crisis on the horizon to legitimise further cuts and liberalisation in healthcare, pensions and family policy, building on policies that had already been initiated under the previous social democrat government. A detailed description of particular austerity measures is given by Saxonberg and Sirovátka (2014: 464), who conclude that some of the most radical reforms came not only before the financial crisis, but also »before the center-right government came to power«, which demonstrates that even the social democrats shared the neoliberal strategy.

However, with the coming of the ODS to power in 2006 (Prime Minister Topolánek) and again 2010 (Prime Minister Nečas), state debt reduction via austerity measures appeared to be the government's only concern, as reflected not only in its policies, but also in its public statements (Draxler 2014). This led to the mobilisation of protest action by not only trade unions, but also newly-established organisations. Given that the general economic situation was far from critical, what most fuelled the protest was the way the austerity measures were politically designed and promoted and their lack of legitimacy in the eyes of the public. The data suggest that the protest intensified before the economic crisis had any actual impact on the national economy, and was a reaction to the government's insistence on pursuing neoliberal reforms without any apparent consideration of their potential social costs (Čísař and Navrátil 2015).

At the time when these new measures were proposed domestically, the European debt crisis added an additional layer of perceived economic insecurity. According to Eurobarometer, in spring 2012 63 per cent of the Czech population tended to distrust the European Union and 86 per cent tended to distrust the national government. In 2012 the platform »Stop the Government« was formed. Over the course of the year it became extremely active and organised several protest events against the government's policies.

In 2013 a major scandal involving Prime Minister Nečas and his close colleagues led to the demise of his government and effectively destroyed the support base of the ODS as the main right wing party in the country. The electoral support of the party evaporated; while in 2010 it still managed to win the elections with 20.2 per cent of the vote, in the 2013 elections the party received only 7.7 per cent.

### Explanatory Approaches: Disappointment in Democracy or Fear of Globalisation?

Contrary to early expectations, the path from a non-democratic regime to a functioning democracy has been seen to be much more difficult than expected. Originally, mainstream political scientists imagined democratisation as a teleological process consisting of consecutive phases culminating in the democratic consolidation of Western-like fully-fledged democracies. Only a few authors warned that not only is democratisation a precarious and non-linear process, but also that the desired ideal, Western democracy, regularly encounters troubles (Tilly 2007). With Trump in the US, Brexit and the rising fortunes of the populist right in some Western countries, this is exactly what is going on right now. Also, some researchers demonstrate that the younger generations in the West tend to be much less supportive of democracy than their parents (Foa and Mounk 2016). Therefore, it is better to see democracy not as an ideal, but a system capable of self-correction (Dalton 2008). In line with these more sceptical views, the expected linear trajectory was not followed even by one of the most promising candidates for democratisation in East-Central Europe, the Czech Republic.

Although the country seemed to perform well during the first phases of democratisation, it experienced a host of problems later on. According to some diagnoses, sup-

port for politicians suddenly declined at the end of the 1990s and people subsequently withdrew from political life and/or turned to populist and anti-democratic forces in search of new solutions (Linek 2010, Hanley 2012). Some area specialists maintain that there has never been a strong liberal political culture in Central-East European countries capable of supporting stable democratic regimes, and that these started to crumble once economic and/or cultural problems emerged and the carrot and stick of European integration disappeared following EU accession in 2004 (Vachudova and Hooghe 2009, Dawson and Hanley 2016). Although it took different forms, the supposed result was the emergence of populist leaders and their parties in all these countries.

The usual story of disenchantment goes like this: The very first stage of democratic transition is characterised by oftentimes idealised and overstated expectations of democracy. Such enthusiasm is widely shared among the populations of democratising societies and is manifested by an enormous level of public involvement in politics and popular support for democratisation and the new political elites. However, in the next phase, the original democratic enthusiasm is sharply contrasted with the bad political and economic performance of the extant regimes. During the transition period new democracies experience economic problems and face political scandals and corruption, which produce disenchantment, disillusion and frustration among citizens. According to this view, democratic disenchantment causes people to withdraw from participation in public life, leads to political disinterest, apathy and erosion of confidence in established democratic actors, and allows a growth in support for populist forces.

It is unclear whether this tendency is to be seen only as a region-specific mechanism, observable only in new democracies, as many area specialists suggest, or whether we are entering a period characterised by a more general trend of growing support for anti-liberal and anti-democratic forces across the globe. For example, some research results from Western Europe show that the political dynamics of globalisation have caused a new cleavage to emerge between those who benefit from globalisation and further integration, and on the other hand »globalisation's losers«, who tend to support nationalistic and xenophobic forces such as radical right parties in the West (Kriesi et al. 2012). Some researchers, moreover, worry that the new young generations have ceased to



see democracy as one of the important values to believe in. In support of this trend they provide data from both the US and the European Union (Foa and Mounk 2016). We may therefore be observing a more universal anti-democratic reversal than just the effect of disenchantment with democracy in newly-democratised regimes.

### An Alternative View: Universal Disenchantment with Globalisation versus East European Disenchantment with Democracy

Several scholars pointed long ago to globalisation's discontents as a potential threat to both established and new democracies, but only now are we living through a true »rebellion against globalisation« (see also Teney et al. 2014). Considering how varied the conditions in different countries are, there are striking similarities in the discourse of the different populist leaders. The political language of the new populists in the US (Trump) and Europe (Farage, Kaczyński, Orbán and others) share a criticism of global corporations (globalism) and a contempt for individual (human) rights. It is a deeply communitarian discourse that attacks any trace of universalism in order to preserve the lifestyle of »our people«. In essence, this new discourse signifies the recent turn of the political mainstream towards economic and cultural nationalism, with *cultural nationalism taking the lead*. Among other developments, Brexit is a clear symptom of the trend described here.

Research thus far has attempted to explain the recent mobilisation of this type of populism by drawing attention to the cleavage that has emerged in the past few decades between the winners of globalisation, who support further integration, and its losers, who support so-called demarcation (the isolation of their societies; see Kriesi et al. 2012; Hutter 2014). The new populists have successfully managed to articulate the fears of globalisation's losers and to channel their anger against both human rights and the international political structures supporting these rights, such as the European Union. Because it is difficult to politically take on the powerful players in economic globalisation, with whom they are in fact aligned in a number of ways, the new populists instead target the weakest figures in the globalisation process, namely refugees and migrants. These figures are also much easier to point to than the anonymous »forces of globalisation«.

### Varieties of Populism in the Czech Republic and Their Support Bases

Regardless of the ultimate cause of the recent developments, we can still try to disentangle political responses to the current crisis on the level of the country analysed in this paper. Drawing on available literature, we can recognise several forms of attitudes to democracy, or any other regime. Moreover, our analyses (Čísař and Linek 2016) show that different types of attitudes provide support for different populist parties that criticise the established (democratic) systems and/or its representatives. Usually, three distinct types of attitudes towards a regime, its institutions and actors are distinguished: regime illegitimacy, political discontent, and alienation (see Montero et al. 1997).

The concept of legitimacy captures the attitudes of people to the democratic regime itself and its basic norms; it is not concerned with the actual performance of politicians, but with the main principle of governance. People high on legitimacy believe in democracy as »the only game in town«. On the other hand, political discontent concerns the actual performance of political elites. Are people satisfied with what the actual representatives did in the previous term? A different issue again is that of democratic ownership (the opposite being alienation), which gauges how much people feel part of the democratic decision-making process, or if they feel there is not much they can change (in this case they feel alienated). In the Czech Republic, while people who tend not to believe in the legitimacy of democracy support the Czech Communists, dissatisfied voters supported the »success story« of the 2013 general election, Andrej Babiš' ANO 2011, while alienated voters were likely to vote for Okamura's xenophobic USVIT (see below for more information).

What, then, is populism about in the Czech Republic today? As demonstrated below, although we can recognise several types, it is managerial populism which resonates the most (something that has so far differentiated the country from some other countries in the region such as Hungary and Poland).

### Left Wing (Social) Populism

Although populism seems to be a fairly current phenomenon in Czech politics, several populist parties emerged prior to the current wave. The most stable among them



is the direct heir to the pre-1989 ruling party, the *Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia* (KSČM), usually classified as an example of »social populism« (March and Mudde 2005). The party remains nominally on the left due to its economic program, but it is clearly very authoritarian and conservative in its sociocultural orientation, mirroring the values of predominantly older generations longing for the lost times of real socialism before 1989. In this respect, the party is usually classified as an anti-democratic force and has been excluded from executive politics on the national level since 1989; its coalition potential equals zero.

In any case, the original internationalism of the communists has long been forgotten and replaced by the Czech people (sometimes referred to as the »lower 10 million« – the population of the Czech Republic is 10 million) suffering under economic globalisation and hardships inflicted by its local handmaidens (right wing politicians and oligarchs). Instead of continuing to present themselves as the avant-garde of the working class, at present the communists see themselves as the people's voice against oppression by powerful economic and political elites that are conceived of as a transnationally-interconnected class, with domestic allies. This type of left-wing populism rejects the globalism of capitalism in favour of the particularism of a specific »people« in danger and in need of protection even if this requires the introduction of some type of authoritarianism (March and Mudde 2005).

### Centrist (Managerial) Populism

Currently, the most significant Czech populist party is ANO 2011, usually classified as centrist or anti-elitist in its form of populism. Founded in 2011 by Andrej Babiš, the second richest Czech entrepreneur and the owner of the country's largest agricultural and food processing holding, Agrofert (also active in many other business sectors, including news media), ANO 2011 repeatedly refers to »the people« and attacks the political elite. Babiš shows similarities to Western-style entrepreneurial populists like Silvio Berlusconi (see the controversial commentary in *Foreign Policy* by Cichowlas and Foxall 2015).

Its political discourse consists of two main components: (1) it was formed against an ineffective and corrupted political elite as opposed to »hard working people«,

who (2) are to be led by an effective leader – Andrej Babiš – and his party managers. The first notion was illustrated by the main slogan used by ANO 2011 in the 2013 parliamentary election campaign: »We are not like politicians. We work hard.« The second one can be illustrated by ANO's slogan from the 2014 municipal and senate election campaign: »Problem? [Several concrete problems were mentioned on billboards.] We will simply solve it.« Unlike Babiš and his followers, the political elite is presented as lazy and corrupted; after more than a year as finance minister, Babiš still uses every opportunity to publicly express his contempt for professional politicians. Hence his mantra is »I am not a politician.« Consequently, politics and the search for compromises are empty words for him, since his real life experience is solely associated with the allegedly rational functioning of the private sector, which in fact serves as the desired model for his concept of politics.

As a result, the core of ANO's program has so far been to substitute management for politics; literally, to »manage the state as a firm«, as is repeatedly stressed by the party leader. In this rhetorical construction, the manager is not only rational and effective, but he is also closer to his employees than a politician is to his voters. Like a caring boss, a metaphor that resonates in the Czech public discourse (cf. the historical example of Bata and his industrial empire in Zlín), Babiš plans to take care not only of all, but of each and every individual. A suitable political solution is to be found neither on the left nor on the right; according to Babiš, we need a rational managerial approach, a technocratic formula that will streamline the functioning of public administration. The main message of the party appears to have found considerable resonance in the population. At present, the party enjoys stable support in opinion polls and Babiš is one of the most trusted politicians in the country.

### Right Wing (Exclusionary) Populism

USVIT (*Dawn of Direct Democracy*) is another political project established by a businessman (Tomio Okamura, until March 2015 the party leader), but of a somewhat different kind than ANO 2011. Okamura was vocal in the public discourse before he established his party; he published books on governance and promoted direct democracy as a corrective to the corrupted regime of representative democracy. Although the structure of

his program is similar to Babiš', he is much more concerned with the (not only hard-working, but also culturally defined) *nation* and its direct governance than with firm-like effectiveness. As a result, his public discourse takes aim at foreign elements in the Czech nation, and at immigration in general. In particular, Okamura was able to skilfully exploit Czech people's obsession with individual success as a defining factor in a person's general worth, something that can be traced back to the very beginning of the 1990s and the neoliberal discourse introduced originally by Václav Klaus. Therefore, anybody in a socially difficult situation is himself/herself to blame for it, and his/her lack of success is the ultimate proof that this person is unable to adapt. In other words, s/he is *unadaptive*, a frequent label whose use contributed – with the help of the public media – to the constitution of the *underclass* in the Czech Republic (unemployed, poor, socially excluded people).

According to Okamura and USVIT, which has disintegrated in the meantime, the time has come for the adaptive people (the nation) to rise up against the unadaptive (who are outside the nation). This is why USVIT promoted the tools of direct democracy, since only these tools would make it possible for the nation to bypass professional politicians. In this view, politicians are not only corrupted, but they provide the unadaptive with cover (often with the aid of the EU and its programmes); and Okamura is here not only to uncover them, but also to make them pay their dues. Recently, USVIT has been brought down by infighting; indeed, the whole right-wing populist scene is being reshuffled. Meanwhile, this type of discourse is currently being expressed by President Zeman, who has recently focused on migrants and Muslims. Likewise, his supporters from the marginal Party of Citizens' Rights (established in 2009 as a political platform for Zeman) joined forces with Okamura, who established a new party (Freedom and Direct Democracy) for the 2016 regional elections.

The president's focus on migration became pronounced during the 2015 European migrant crisis. In summer 2015 migration and its potential dangers became the most important topic of public debate, with President Zeman actively torpedoing any solidarity with refugees and/or other European states targeted by refugees. In this situation, migration and the supposed inability of the European Union to deal with it became intercon-

nected in the public discourse. While in the 2013 general elections migration and the European Union did not play a major role, this may change depending on the situation in the EU when the next election comes (2017). In other words, criticism of the EU has not fuelled populist protest votes in the Czech Republic thus far, although there is a degree of scepticism regarding it. The most important issue, serving as the springboard for Babiš and his party, was corruption, which he even successfully used in the 2016 regional elections.

## Conclusions and Courses of Action

In terms of mobilising issues, transformation does not play an important role in the contemporary Czech Republic. As demonstrated by the previous section, new issues are being articulated in the political sphere, and their relation to the transformation years is usually not mentioned. Of course, critical accounts of the original transformation strategies have emerged, especially among left-leaning economists and commentators (Švihlíková and others), but in terms of mobilisation, it is no longer salient. Probably the last time when transformation was explicitly the subject of public discussion was the amnesty granted by President Klaus at the end of his second term in January 2013, which included some transformation-related scandals and alleged crimes. Still, there is a mood of disappointment and distrust in (traditional) politics in the Czech Republic, which is testified by various data sources. Although the ultimate transformation goal, the return to Europe, has indeed been achieved, the expected paradise never arrived. In fact, the post-accession period was marked by a series of crises in the EU (Euro crisis, migrant crisis), which contributed to the currently sceptical stance of the Czech population towards the Union.

At the same time, the EU has thus far not become a mobilisation topic in the country. Recently, the major mobilisation topic in Czech politics has been anti-corruption, which helped Babiš to form his political party in 2013. As regards migration, it is not and it is not likely to become a mobilisation issue in any elections, since there is a broad consensus across the political spectrum on a restrictive position towards migration. The main mobilisation issues are likely to become labour remuneration and taxation. However, it is not at all clear that the current Social Democrats will be able to articulate them.

The party recently seems to be stuck in the past and its own problems, and is therefore unlikely to be able to set a new political agenda.

Although corruption and lack of transparency in dealing with public funds can be traced back to the transformation experience, current solutions can hardly go back in time. Even in the public discourse, current corruption is not related to the transformation experience, but to the current political class. There exists a certain consensus pointing to a deficient institutional structure, insufficient legislation and an incapable judiciary as the main problems of the early transformation. However, recently the country has been dealing with problems of *tax evasion*, *profit repatriation*, and *inadequate wages*, which seem to be more related to the *international economic integration of the Czech economy* than to the original transition steps. Of course, this uneven international integration can be seen as being part of the transformation process, since internationalisation was a response to the mismanaged 1990s transformation in the »Czech way«. At the same time, »we are all global now« and the Social Democrats are therefore facing challenges similar to those in the West.

Compared to big and/or technologically developed countries, the situation is heavily influenced by the fact of economic dependency and the inability to climb the ladder of international division of labour fast. A new public debate on the Czech Republic as an »assembly line« is taking off. This is due to several factors; low wages and the underfunded education system probably stand out among them. Currently, trade unions are running a campaign called »Stop cheap labour«, with a focus on the level of remuneration in the education sector as part of it.

In general, progressive forces need to focus on fair wages and employment conditions, including in the public sector. The middle class and its support is key here. There is a need for a new plan that will help the country to participate in the international division of labour on more equal terms, such as support for the education system. At the same time, the social democrats need to regain their ability to speak on behalf of those who feel unprivileged and/or unable to seize the opportunities offered by the current globalised conditions. These should also include those who are trying to escape war in their home countries. Since the main line of conflict is defined

in economic terms, the Czech Social Democratic Party would probably not be harmed electorally if it presented itself as a culturally more open party, willing to participate in European solutions to the current migrant crisis.

At present, the country is part of the post-communist block of new member states, which share a rather restrictive stance towards refugees. In the long term, this may harm the position of the country within the EU; thus, it would make sense to reconsider particular policy steps and the country's self-presentation. However, the generally sceptical mood in the country and the divisions within the Social Democratic Party mean this may be very difficult to achieve, given also that the social democrats' main rival, ANO 2011, has expressed a very restrictive stance and has recently been teaming up with President Zeman in this regard. So, what can be done?

This paper has intended to show that populism and possible responses to it cannot be seen as a country-specific problem. The Czech Republic exists in a wider global context. After the end of the Cold War, human rights, together with democracy, became the main political language for a globalising world. The global spread of the human rights agenda, witnessed in the gradual institutionalisation of human rights norms, was accompanied by other forms of globalisation, mainly economic globalisation. In other words, the human rights agenda spread together with the advance of global capitalism and its neoliberal principles. While economic globalisation created new opportunities for some segments of the population, mainly the educated and well qualified, it made life difficult for others, who found it hard to adjust to the new globalised conditions.

If globalisation created groups of losing voters, it did nothing to help progressive forces that could have articulated their interests. The political left, which traditionally advocated the interests of the less educated and poorer segments of the population, has recently become a full participant in the globalisation consensus alongside mainstream right-wing forces. Consequently, there are no available political agencies for a person to support if s/he feels a need to express political discontent (except for left populists in Greece and Spain). The new populism is the only available outlet through which people discontented with globalisation can express themselves. To defeat the new radical populism in its many variations, the democratic left needs to articulate the



interests that populists articulate, but to do so in a way that differs from them. In general, there is a need for a new political language that will help progressive and inclusive political forces to articulate the substantiated fears of globalisation's losers without subscribing to hate speech and racism. In other words, the democratic left needs to formulate a political language for the articulation of a human rights-friendly populism or, in other words, globalisation with a human face.

Note: This chapter draws on and makes use of research previously reported in Čisař and Navrátil 2016, Čisař and Navrátil 2015, Čisař and Vráblíková 2016, Čisař and Linek 2016, Čisař and Štětka 2016.



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