

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

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

Presidential election in Czech republic
11th and 12th January 2013 (1st round)

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 Wratistaw 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 "eurofederalist" 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.

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