

# Milos Zeman, the new President of the Czech Republic

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Results  
(2nd round)

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

Milos Zeman rallied the votes of the left and enjoyed strong support on the part of voters in the provinces, whilst Karel Schwarzenberg won Prague and several major towns (Brno, Plzen, Liberec, Ceske Budejovice, Hradec Kralove, Karlovy Vary and Zlin). The former Prime Minister did not receive the support of the official candidate of the biggest left wing party, the Social Democratic Party's (CSSD), Jiri Dienstbier (16.12% of the vote in the first round), who refused to give any voting advice for the second round, qualifying both candidates as being "fundamentally on the right" and accused Milos Zeman of having links with the Mafia. The Social Democratic Party leader Bohuslav Sobotka, said however that he was delighted with the latter's victory. The former

Prime Minister called for the support of the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (KSCM) between the two rounds of the election and received the support of outgoing President Vaclav Klaus, who explained that he wanted the head of State to be a citizen who had lived his entire life in the Czech Republic – "in the good and bad times". Karel Schwarzenberg's family fled the communist regime that was established in the former Czechoslovakia in 1948; the Foreign Minister lived in exile for 41 years, notably in Austria, Germany and in Switzerland, before returning to his homeland. The turnout rate totalled 59.11% ie -2.2 points less in comparison with the figure recorded in the first round. The Czechs abroad voted more than two weeks ago.

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

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

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

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<b>Premysl Sobotka (ODS)</b>	126 846	2.46		
<b>Jana Bobosikova (Sovereignty, SBB)</b>	123 171	2.39		

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

**An aggressive electoral campaign**

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

The Benes Decrees, named after their signatory, former President of Czechoslovakia Edvard Benes, who from 1938 to 1945 led the Czechoslovak government in exile (he resigned in 1948 after the communist coup d'état) made a surprise entry into the electoral campaign. These four documents – on the national administration of the property of the Germans, Hungarians and traitors (19th June), the deprivation of Germans and Hungarians of Czechoslovak citizenship (2nd August) and the confiscation of enemy property (25th October) - date back to 1945. They led to the expulsion and dispossession of around 3 million Germans and 100,000 Hungarians who were living in the Sudetenland at the end of the Second World War. Although the Benes Decrees no longer have any legal force, they do continue to be part of Czech legislation.

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

that was seized at the time.

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

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

**Cohabitation as Head of State**

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

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

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

### Who is the new President of the Czech Republic?

Milos Zeman, who is 68 years old, is an economist. He joined the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (KSC) in 1968 before being excluded from it two years later. In 1992 he became a member of the Social Democra-

tic Party which he became the leader of the following year. In 1996 he was appointed Speaker of the Chamber of Deputies. Appointed Prime Minister in 1998 he signed a pact called "an agreement for the creation of a stable political environment in the Czech Republic," with the Civic Democratic Party (ODS), which at the time was led by Vaclav Klaus. According to this agreement the latter promised not to launch a motion of censure against the Social Democratic government led by Milos Zeman for the entire duration of the legislature. In exchange the ODS was consulted before the vote on any major project and achieved access to some strategic posts in various institutions on behalf of its members (the Speaker of the Chamber of Deputies went to Vaclav Klaus for example).

In 2003, Milos Zeman ran in the presidential election for the first time. He failed. Vaclav Klaus was finally elected as head of State. He then chose to withdraw from political life. He came back seven years later however to found the Citizens' Rights Party (SPO) in 2010, which, with 4.33% of the vote, failed to enter parliament during the general elections on 28th and 29th May 2010 (a minimum of 5% of the votes cast is required to be represented). Milos Zeman then resigned from the leadership of the party of which he was elected honorary chairman last November.

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

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