

Petr Pavel elected President of the Czech Republic

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Petr Pavel, who ran as an independent candidate, won the second round of the presidential election in the Czech Republic by a wide margin. He garnered 58.32% of the vote while his opponent, Andrej Babis (Action of Dissatisfied Citizens, ANO), won 41.67%.

Petr Pavel was elected by the 23,000 Czechs who voted from abroad, who gave him 95.21% of the vote (4.78% for Andrej Babis).

Turnout totalled 70.25%, the highest ever recorded in a presidential election and 2.01 points higher than in the first round on 13 and 14 January.

This election was a confrontation between two personalities but above all between two ways of doing politics. Moreover, it was a matter of seeing whether the right, which had won the legislative elections of 8 and 9 October 2021, could win again. The ruling Spolu (Together) coalition, which includes Prime Minister Petr Fiala's Civic Democratic Party (ODS), the

Christian Democratic Union-People's Party (KDU-CSL) and Tradition, Responsibility, Prosperity 09 (TOP 09), supported Petr Pavel for the presidential election.

The (retired) general was also supported by the former rector of the Tomas Masaryk University in Brno, Danuse Nerudova (independent), who came third with 13.93% of the vote in the first round, Pavel Fischer (independent) (6.75% of the vote) and Marek Hilser (independent) (2.56%).

After the results, the new head of state thanked all the voters who went to the polls and "paid tribute to democracy". "I see no losers or winners in this presidential election", said Petr Pavel.

Results of the presidential elections held on 13-14 and 27-28 January 2023 in the Czech Republic

Turnout: 68.24% (1st round) and 70.25% (2nd round)

| Candidates | Number of votes won (1st round) | % of votes obtained (1st round) | Number of votes won (2nd round) | % of votes obtained (2nd round) |
|--|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Petr Pavel (independent) | 1 975 056 | 35.40 | 3 359 151 | 58.32 |
| Andrej Babis (Action by dissatisfied citizens, ANO) | 1 952 213 | 34.99 | 2 400 046 | 41.67 |
| Danuse Nerudova (independent) | 777 080 | 13.93 | | |
| Pavel Fischer (independent) | 376 705 | 6.75 | | |
| Jaroslav Basta (Freedom and Direct Democracy, SPD) | 248 375 | 4.45 | | |
| Marek Hilser (independent) | 142 912 | 2.56 | | |
| Karel Divis (independent) | 75 475 | 1.35 | | |
| Tomas Zima (independent) | 30 769 | 0.55 | | |

Source : <https://www.volby.cz/pls/prez2023/pe2?xjazyk=CZ>

Presidential election in Czech Republic 27-28th January 2023

"Petr Pavel is not affiliated with any party and he has not had a political career, which makes him acceptable to a large part of the Czech population," said Jan Charvat, a political science lecturer at Charles University in Prague. "He is neither an ideologue nor a party man. He is more euro-pragmatic than euro-enthusiastic like the ruling coalition", said Jacques Rupnik, political scientist at Sciences Po and specialist in Central Europe.

Petr Pavel emphasised his international and diplomatic experience, which is undeniably an asset when negotiating with heads of state. Last November, he indicated that he wanted to return to the old "division of labour" when the President of the Republic represented the Czech Republic at the NATO and UN summits, with the Prime Minister taking on this representation function within the European Union.

Finally, "by promising order, he is biting into a nationalist electorate, very far from his liberal, pro-European, rather urban electoral base", said Lukas Macek, director of the Sciences Po campus in Dijon, specialising in Central Europe. "I can't ignore the fact that people increasingly feel that we are living in disorder and uncertainty. That the state has somehow stopped functioning. We need to change that. We need to have rules that are valid for everyone and respected by everyone. We need a clean sweep," wrote Petr Pavel.

"Andrej Babis believes that his highly confrontational rhetoric can push more people to vote in the second round," said Tomas Mazaryk, professor of political science at Brno University. During the campaign between the two rounds, Andrej Babis repeatedly accused his rival of warmongering, claiming that he would lead the Czech Republic to war. During the televised debate on 22 January, the former prime minister (2017-2021) said that as head of state he would not send Czech troops in the event that his NATO allies were attacked. "I would not drag the Czech Republic into the war. I am a diplomat, not a soldier.

But his confrontational rhetoric did not work. Andrej Babis is too divisive and controversial, a man hated

by too many people to be able to gather a majority to his name.

Petr Pavel, 61, from Plana in the west of the country, is a graduate of the Vyskov Military School of Land Forces and the Brno Military Academy. He joined the Communist Party in 1982, for which he has apologised several times. "I was born into a family where membership of the Communist Party was considered normal. I did not have enough information and experience to assess the criminal nature of the regime. Now I know it was a mistake," he said. "To all those who suffered from this regime, of which I was a part, I apologise."

Petr Pavel nevertheless made a point of specifying that he had, later, at the head of the Czech army staff and then as chairman of the NATO Military Committee, proved that he was now and had been for a long time in the service of democracy. "For thirty-three years I have been involved in the democratisation of our country and I have campaigned for a pro-Western course (...) I believe that my actions clearly show the values I stand for and the fact that I am ready to fight to preserve them," he stressed.

After 1989, Petr Pavel obtained a master's degree in international relations at King's College London. In January 1993, he set up a rescue operation that succeeded in helping Czech volunteers save 53 French soldiers from a UNPROFOR unit under siege by the Serbs. This action, as well as the care taken to repatriate the bodies of the two French soldiers who died during the offensive, earned him the French Military Valour Cross with Bronze Star in 1995.

Petr Pavel subsequently held a number of positions in several European countries before being appointed Chief of Staff of the Czech Army in 2012, a position he held for three years. In 2015, he became chairman of the NATO Military Committee, the first man from a former Warsaw Pact country to hold this position. He retired from the armed forces in 2018.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, Petr Pavel founded Strong Together, an association that helped people in need.

The new president will be sworn in on 9 March in the Vladislav Hall of Prague Castle, the official residence of heads of state. Petr Pavel's first trip abroad will take him, in accordance with the tradition in force since the separation of the Czechs and Slovaks in 1993, to Bratislava.

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