

The Czech Republic: the government will stay in power till the autumn

Jakub Groszkowski, Czechy: gabinet prezydencki będzie rządził do jesieni

On 7 August the Chamber of Deputies rejected the vote of confidence for the Jiri Rusnok government. The Czech Social Democratic Party (CSSD), the Communists (KSCM) and the centrist Public Affairs party (VV) supported the government which is close to President Milos Zeman. The parties of the former centre-right coalition - the Civic Democratic Party (ODS), TOP 09 and the fringe party LIDEM - were opposed to the vote of confidence. Three MPs from the centre-right broke ranks and casted no vote, this preventing the former coalition from having a majority in the Chamber of Deputies. This has led the leaders of TOP 09 to call for a snap election. The same demand is made by CSSD and KSCM. A vote to curtail the current term has been planned for next week. The election could take place in October.

Commentary

- The lack of support from parliament will substantially impede the work of the Rusnok government which is controlled by the president. On the other hand, Zeman has succeeded in persuading CSSD to pledge support to the government against the position held by the party's leader Bohuslav Sobotka. By influencing the CSSD's deputy president, Michal Hasek President Zeman has reinforced his position with the Social Democrats. This gives Zeman a chance to maintain control over the government also after the parliamentary election which CSSD is the favourite to win. The president has announced that he will appoint a representative of the victorious party as prime minister following the election but he has not promised that it will be the party's leader.
- CSSD, KSCM and TOP 09 have a total of 122 seats (out of 200) and this enables them to call for the current term to be brought to an end ahead of schedule. In practice, however, their leaders' plans can be scuppered if President Zeman applies pressure on certain of the MPs from these parties. Only three MPs from these parties need to be absent in order for the motion to curtail the current term to be thrown out. This then means that the question of early elections may be decided by MPs from ODS which is not doing well in opinion polls.
- Many factors suggest that one of the key objectives of establishing a government favourable to the president will be to promote the Party of Civic Rights – Zemanovci

(SPOZ) which is linked to Zeman and which does not have representatives in the Chamber of Deputies. This is further confirmed by the appointment of the SPOZ deputy president Radek Augustin as the president of the Office of the Government. It cannot be ruled out that ministers will be on the electoral lists of this party. Good relations with social partners and the lack of infighting among coalition partners, which paralysed the work of the Necas government, will also serve the purpose of building a positive image for the government. The Rusnok government is composed of the people who are loyal to President Milos Zeman. Several ministers have a background in the management of the Czech Republic's largest companies and have openly stated that they will return to their companies after completing their term in the government.

- Rusnok's government differs from the previous one in that it opts for closer integration with the EU and attaches importance to obtaining EU funds which it sees as a substantial growth incentive. As far as the economy is concerned, the Rusnok government favours the state following an active investment policy (including investments in transport infrastructure) and support for large industrial plants. Despite new focal points the agenda of the Rusnok government in many areas is capitalising on the solutions prepared by the Necas government.