

# Czech Protest Movements in the 2014 European Parliament Elections

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**Abstract:** *This article explores the performance of ANO 2011 and Dawn of Direct Democracy—two new subjects of the post-2013 Czech party system—in the 2014 elections to the European Parliament. Programs and statements of both movements are analyzed in order to determine whether a link exists between protest and populist characteristics on one side and Euroscepticism on the other side.*

**Key words:** *party, political party, elections, European Parliament, European Union, Euroscepticism, ANO 2011, Dawn of Direct Democracy*

## Introduction

The 2013 elections to the Chamber of Deputies in the Czech Republic marked the success of several protest and populist movements, such as the Action of Dissatisfied Citizens (ANO 2011) and Tomio Okamura's Dawn of Direct Democracy (*Úsvit přímé demokracie Tomia Okamury*), in particular with ANO 2011 coming in second and becoming one of the ruling coalition parties.

Since then, a lot has been written and analyzed concerning the reasons and consequences of the 2013 Chamber of Deputies election result; however, not much has been studied concerning the performance of these populist and protest parties in subsequent, second-order elections. Despite its second-order status these election can help us answer how the new players have adapted to all levels of governance, and whether (and with what results) are they able to compete on all other levels and not only the first-order and cabinet-related Chamber of Deputies.

**Table 1: Election Results—2013 Chamber of Deputies**

Party / Movement	Votes	%	Mandates
ČSSD	1,016,829	18.65	50
ANO 2011	927,24	18.65	47
KSČM	741,044	14.91	33
TOP 09	596,357	11.99	26
ODS	384,174	7.72	16
Úsvit	342,339	6.88	14
KDU-ČSL	336,97	6.78	14

Abbreviations: ANO 2011—Action of Dissatisfied Citizens; ČSSD—Czech Social Democratic Party; KDU-ČSL—Christian Democratic Union – Czechoslovak Peoples Party; KSČM—Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia; ODS—Civic Democratic Party; TOP 09—Tradition, Responsibility, Prosperity; Úsvit—Dawn of Direct Democracy.

Source: Czech Statistical Office—Electoral Section, 2013.

From October 2013, when the Chamber of Deputies elections were held, until now (beginning of 2016) there have been three other second-order elections in the Czech Republic: the European Parliament elections in May 2014, local (municipal) elections in October 2014 and elections to one-third (27 seats) of the Senate, also in October 2014.

This article focuses on the European level and tries to answer the questions: How did ANO 2011 and Dawn of Direct Democracy perform during the 2014 European Parliament elections? What were their major *European positions*? and most importantly, does their protest and populist nature and features corresponded with Euroscepticism? The key hypothesis is that, according to Petr Kaniok, party-based Euroscepticism is present in other parties as a form of protest and therefore can be observed among protest, anti-establishment, or extreme political parties (Kaniok 2006: 10–13).

## The Czech Republic's 2014 elections to the European Parliament in general

Seven Czech political parties or movements crossed the 5 percent threshold and entered the European Parliament in 2014. While ANO 2011 defended its position in the party system also during this second-order competition, Dawn of Direct Democracy failed and did not enter the European Parliament. Instead one new political party, not present in the Parliament on a national level, won one seat (the hardline Eurosceptic Party of Free Citizens [SSO]).

This marked the first time since the Czech Republic's entry to the European Union in 2004 that a hardline Eurosceptic party gained representation in the European Parliament. Euroscepticism existed previous, but it was manifested through two traditionally *soft* Eurosceptic party formations, the right-wing Civic Democratic Party (ODS) and the left-wing Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (KSČM). In the first term (2004–2009) there were also two members representing Eurosceptic views, but they were elected from the list of a declared non-Eurosceptic movement known as the Independents (Just 2015: 116).

**Table 2: Election Results—2014 European Parliament (Czech Republic)**

Party / Movement	EP faction	Votes	%	Mandates
ANO 2011	ALDE	244,501	16.13	4
TOP09+STAN	EPP	241,747	15.95	4
ČSSD	S&D	214,8	14.17	4
KSČM	GUE/NGL	166,478	10.98	3
KDU-ČSL	EPP	150,792	9.95	3
ODS	ECR	116,389	7.67	2
SSO	EFDD	79,54	5.24	1
...				
Úsvit	-----	47,306	3.12	0

Abbreviations (Czech parties): ANO 2011—Action of Dissatisfied Citizens; ČSSD—Czech Social Democratic Party; KDU-ČSL—Christian Democratic Union – Czechoslovak Peoples Party; KSČM—Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia; ODS—Civic Democratic Party; SSO—Party of Free Citizens; STAN—Mayors and Independents; TOP 09—Tradition, Responsibility, Prosperity; Úsvit—Dawn of Direct Democracy.

Abbreviations (EP factions): ALDE—Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe; ECR—European Conservatives and Reformists; EFDD—Europe of Freedom and Direct Democracy; EPP—European People's Party; GUE/NGL—European United Left – Nordic Green Left; S & D—Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats.

Source: Czech Statistical Office – Electoral Section, 2014.

## Dawn of Direct Democracy

The Dawn of Direct Democracy movement represented soft Euroscepticism during the 2014 European Parliament elections, although their rhetoric sometimes sounded more radical. The movement generally called for a “stronger position of the Czech Republic within the European Union and preserving national sovereignty and identity” (Úsvit 2014). They criticized the too bureaucratic and expensive structures of European institutions.

Their 2014 program for the European Parliament elections included several critical statements towards the European Union and its policies, e.g. against the current state of EU migration policy or against Turkey's and Ukraine's membership in the Union (Úsvit 2014).

This critical approach could also be seen in their position towards the euro currency and its adoption in the Czech Republic—a typical Eurosceptic issue. Dawn of Direct Democracy opposes euro adoption without a referendum, and they also predict that the referendum—once it is held—would fail (Úsvit 2014).

However, there were no plans or calls for a withdrawal of the Czech Republic from the European Union. They even, a little bit pathetically, praised the idea of a “common European house” (Úsvit 2014). On the other hand, quite surprisingly, they called for a common European Union defense policy and for the EU to assert more control over its common food safety policy (Úsvit 2014). However, the movement failed to get to the European Parliament, as it got only 3.12 percent of the vote.

The movement faced several internal crises and clashes in 2015, which eventually led to a split, wherein some members (including movement founder and chairman Tomio Okamura) leaving and founding a new political party. The new party, Freedom and Direct Democracy (SPD), unlike Dawn of Direct Democracy, launched a very hardline Eurosceptic program, which included open calls for a referendum on the Czech Republic's withdrawal from the EU.

Since then, however, national-level preferences for both movements have been below the 5 percent threshold, and it has not changed—even with the rise of new issues and agendas related to migration, in which both movements very actively champion anti-immigrant positions. Both movements lack strong, charismatic, and trustworthy leaders, and their strategies when merging and cooperating with other political groups and movements are rather controversial (such as cooperating with the radical Anti-Islamic Bloc, led by Martin Konvička, or the anti-Semitic activist Adam Bartoš, or Miroslav Sládek, the former iconic leader of the xenophobic Union for the Republic – Republican Party of Czechoslovakia).

## **Action of Dissatisfied Citizens (ANO 2011)**

The ANO 2011 movement was founded by billionaire businessman and media mogul Andrej Babiš. Its program was based on a critical attitude towards “past corrupt cabinets.” As stated above, following its success in the 2013 Chamber of Deputies elections, the movement became a part of the ruling coalition, alongside the Social Democrats and Christian Democrats. However, since the government was appointed just four months before the European Parliament elections, the ruling parties avoided the negative impacts of second-order elections, as the European Parliament elections fell into the *honeymoon period* after the

cabinet appointment. Moreover, even while being a part of the ruling coalition, the movement maintained its protest potential and continued in its criticism of predecessors, “uncovering all the evil that was left after previous cabinets.”

While the classification of Dawn of Direct Democracy as a (soft) Eurosceptic party is quite clear, it is much more difficult to classify ANO 2011's position. Generally speaking, ANO 2011 is a programmatically and ideologically ambivalent movement.

ANO 2011 spoke against adoption of the euro and against any deeper EU integration during and after the 2013 Chamber of Deputies elections (Rakt 2013). A few months later, before the 2014 European Parliament elections (and already as a ruling party) they carefully admitted that the Czech Republic should consider adopting the euro, but only after stabilizing the budget and reducing the deficit (Santa 2014). According to their European Parliament elections program they were in favor of signing the European Fiscal Compact (which had been opposed by previous right-wing governments) and criticized the Eurosceptic positions of former President Václav Klaus as well as the rather reserved positions of previous cabinets towards the European Union (ANO 2011, 2014)

The movement also criticized the no-confidence motion against one of the previous Czech cabinets initiated by the opposition (and passed) during the period of the Czech Presidency in the Council of the European Union (in March 2009), and the under-representation of Czech citizens in European Union bodies (ANO 2011, 2014). In May 2015, one year after the European Parliament elections, the movement came up with the idea of holding a “non-binding control referendum” on the issue of euro adoption (Kopecký 2015). This proposal, however, begs the questions, what does such a thing actually mean? since referenda are not included in the Czech Republic's constitutional system. And even if it had, many politicians, legal experts and commentators got stuck on the term “non-binding control referendum,” since nothing like this actually exists.

As we stated above, ANO 2011's position towards European issues is not quite clear. On one side, the pro-European position of ANO 2011 could clearly be seen in the profiles of most members of the European Parliament elected from the ANO 2011 list. Three of the four ANO 2011 MEPs had worked at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs as professional diplomats, and all were associated with the Czech Republic – European Union accession talks. The list leader, Pavel Telička, was the chief negotiator for Czech accession to the European Union, former Secretary of State for European Affairs and the first member of the European Commission from the Czech Republic (2004). Petr Ježek, second on the list, is also a former diplomat specializing in European affairs who used to serve as Deputy Secretary of State for European Affairs. The third ANO 2011 MEP, Dita Charanzová, worked on Pavel Telička's team in negotiating the Czech

Republic's entry to the European Union. However, it is true that none of them is actually a member of ANO 2011. They were all elected as non-partisans on the ANO 2011 list.

Membership in the pro-European EP faction, the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE) could serve as an argument in favor of classifying ANO 2011 as pro-European leaning. However, this could also be seen as a rather pragmatic step by Andrej Babiš to gain international and European recognition for his newly founded political movement.

## Conclusion

This paper examined the performance of two populist and protest movements, which became part of the Czech party system after the 2013 Chamber of Deputies elections, toward the European Union and European issues generally. The research was based on documents related to the 2014 European Parliament elections. As we saw, the first one, Dawn of Direct Democracy, was at that time a typical representative of soft Euroscepticism. After the foundation of a new movement, Freedom and Direct Democracy, the hardline Eurosceptic features prevailed.

Where the second movement, ANO 2011, is concerned the situation is not so clear. The movement's position on European issues reflects a general lack of foreign and European policy skills among party leaders, and its positions are usually based on how it is advantageous for the movement. Both Eurosceptic and pro-European features can be found in the party program and statements of its leaders, which only highlights the populist characteristics of the movement.

We can also conclude that ANO 2011 strengthened its position in the Czech party system by spreading its representation to the European level. On the other hand, the failure of Dawn of Direct Democracy showed only the episodic potential of this populist movement without any major attraction for voters, although second-order elections could theoretically be a much better environment for that type of political party.

ANO 2011 proved to have acted more pragmatically in recruiting candidates for the European Parliament elections, as most of its top leaders were former professional diplomats closely related to European Union issues.

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