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Populism in the first European elections in the Czech Republic

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Abstract

The paper seeks to examine the phenomenon of populism in connection with the first EP elections in the Czech Republic (CZ). It aspires to answer the question whether the first EP elections can be described as populist and, if yes, then owing to which parties. It gives a basic overview of the electoral system, the actors involved and the voter turnout. It attempts to define populism and distinguish it from euroscepticism. The paper's key focal point is then the application of the identified attributes of populism on those political parties that received more than 1 % of the vote. The findings lead to the rejection of the assertion about a populist character of the EP elections in the CZ, and a classification of individual actors is suggested.

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1. Introduction

The 2004 European Parliament (EP) Elections have so far been Europe's biggest elections ever. Irrespective of the immense potential of voters and candidates standing for election, this ballot reinforced the tendency towards declining voter turnout. This was also very true in the Czech Republic (CZ), where the theory of second order election was fully applicable (Franklin 1996: 190). The elections in the CZ were marked by low voter turnout and dominance of national themes, and last but not least were used by many voters as a channel for expressing their dissatisfaction with the then ruling coalition. In this respect, the first European elections actually led to the resignation of the cabinet of Vladimír Špidla, Prime Minister and leader of the Social Democratic Party. The ruling Social Democrats lost 21.3 % of the vote in comparison to the previous elections to the Chamber of Deputies, while their major right-wing opposition rival won around 30 % of the vote. This result came as a surprise to the country's political arena, conveying an impression of radical division and a turning point in political strategy. However, in spite of these startling results, the CZ witnessed no significant turbulence. Changes remained limited to personnel replacements among top-ranking Social Democrats.

Despite the dramatic course with respect to changes in the government, these elections remained within the boundaries of a second order election and did not have a substantial impact on the arrangement of power within the political system. Still, they represented a major turning point for the CZ and attracted close media attention. They were the first elections to the EP ever, and were held closely after the country's accession to the EU. One of the phenomena repeatedly highlighted by the media was the phenomenon of populism⁽¹⁾. But is it really possible to say that the elections to the EP in the CZ succumbed to this phenomenon, and that the political parties involved resorted in a large measure to populism? And if this was the case, did this phenomenon permeate the

parliamentary parties firmly established within the political system, or did it represent a marginal phenomenon concerning extra-parliamentary groups that simply got a lot of media exposure? Were the first Czech European Union elections populist? Examining populism on the ground in the CZ is without doubt legitimate. For example, the populist, far-right Party for the Republic – Republican Party of Czechoslovakia (SPR-RSČ) had seats in the Chamber of Deputies of the Parliament of the Czech Republic until 1998.(2)

This paper cannot aspire to analyse the phenomenon of populism in the comparative perspective of the EU, although such a study would certainly be interesting. Nevertheless, it can seek to map the occurrence of this phenomenon in the CZ during the 2004 elections, and to find answers to the aforementioned questions. A basic preliminary condition is the attempt to define the attributes of populism, and to apply these criteria to the behaviour of parties during the EP elections. Qualitative analysis and the comparative method seem the most adequate approaches for achieving this goal.

2. Populism – attractive to the media, but ill-defined [↑]

Turmoil in the European political arena is often associated with the phenomenon of populism. The media frequently refers to the behaviour of governments, top executives and parties as populist(3). Analysing this phenomenon in the domain of social sciences is, however, not an easy task. Populism is a broad concept, and despite the term being commonplace in general discourse, it is rather complicated to grasp. The term populism may be widespread, but has never really been clearly classified and defined (cf. Miller 1995: 382-383, Stolkay 2000: 1). In the absence of a definition of populism, and given the inability to grasp the phenomenon in empirical practice, the term teeters on the edge between scientifically defined terms and expressions used in journalism. In general discourse, populism is often confused with euroscepticism. Unlike populism, euroscepticism can, however, be accurately defined and has been the subject of intensive research (cf. Taggart and Szczerbiak 2003). The so-called soft euroscepticism (Taggart and Szczerbiak 2002) does come close to populism, but is always defined exclusively in relation to European integration and membership in the EU. On the contrary, populism is without doubt a broader and a more complex concept, which is not limited merely to the process of European integration. The fact that the election programmes of parties competing in the EP elections show differing positions on the EU does not mean that populism in the EP elections equals euroscepticism. Moreover, the term populism has a very long history, unlike euroscepticism that was not defined until the EC had been constituted.

Political science has attempted to define populism in specific areas. It distinguishes between agrarian, political and economic populism (Mudde 2000). The category of political populism implies application of far-reaching democratic rules and delegation of control mechanisms to the people, but at the same time also the rule of charismatic or authoritarian dictatorships. Therefore it is very difficult to define the concrete features of populism. Attempts to formulate basic propositions build on the assumption that representatives of populist movements resort to arguments at the level of the lowest common denominator, and that their action is targeted at a defined entity.

This paper tries to analyse populism along the following criteria: First, populism assumes a division of society into two basic groups and presupposes a conflict between “the people“(4) and the elite, which believes “the people” to be unfit for public governance. Second, populist movements foster selective state interventions in the market economy aiming at the protection of national economy and stimulation of domestic consumption. Third, they call for the protection of the society against advancement of non-traditional religions and ethnic or other minorities. Fourth, populists advocate the instruments of direct democracy.(5)

Populism can be found on both the left and the right wing of the political spectrum, and its political meaning cannot be clearly defined. Rather than a political doctrine, populism is a calculated and highly flexible strategy whose application depends on the political and cultural environment. Populism can also represent a mere external tactic by political entities that do not necessarily implement their stated principles in practice. For these reasons, the study of factors of populism is very difficult and, for the most part, limited to searching for evidence of its individual components as they appear in political practice. One possible source of data are political election programmes, which represent the only source of undistorted data, and are a relatively stable output in comparison with other activities of political entities.

3. EP elections in the Czech Republic [↑]

3.1. The electoral system [↑]

Electoral rules always have an impact on the political arena and on the behaviour of political parties during electoral competition. The European Parliamentary Elections Act passed in the CZ in 2003 was no exception (Act No. 62/2003).

Generally speaking, the selected electoral system for the EP elections in the CZ corresponded with the profile of a typical “EU” arrangement.⁽⁶⁾ It contains a system of proportional representation, with a single electoral district, closed lists of candidates, and active suffrage at the age of 18 (passive suffrage at the age of 21). The elections were carried out by secret ballot on the basis of universal, equal, and direct suffrage. They were subject to a 5 % threshold and allowed for two priority votes. Mandates were allocated using D’Hondt divisor formula. Upon registration of their list of candidates, parties and coalitions paid a non-refundable fee in the amount of CZK 15,000. Similarly as in the case of domestic elections, the elections took place over two polling days.⁽⁷⁾ The mandate of a Member of the European Parliament has been defined as incompatible with the office of the deputy or senator, with a governmental function, presidency and similar important positions (Act No. 62/2003).

3.2. A competition between 31 entities [↑]

As regards the electoral mechanism, the European elections resembled elections to the Chamber of Deputies of the Parliament of the Czech Republic.⁽⁸⁾ Data on elections to the Chamber of Deputies and the European results show that there is a tendency in the CZ towards participation by a rising number of candidates. In the 1996 parliamentary elections 20 entities stood for election; in 1998 18 entities ran, and by 2002 there were altogether 29 parties, movements and coalitions involved. The 2004 European elections continued this upward trend in the number of candidates. Out of the 31 registered entities, 17 were newly established for the sole purpose of the EP candidacy. Only 9 entities ran in all elections held between 1996 and 2004 and thus can be considered stable actors in the electoral arena aspiring to both the national and European levels of politics.⁽⁹⁾

The opposition Civic Democratic Party (ODS) emerged from the elections as the winner (see [Table 1](#)). The Czech Social Democratic Party (ČSSD) lost 21,3 % of the electorate and suffered a crushing defeat. Dissatisfied social democratic voters inclined towards the winning opposition ODS, the Communists, or independent candidates.

The emergence of lists of candidates composed of independents is the most singular aspect of the elections in the CZ. Independent candidates had sought to set up their own lists of candidates in national elections in the past, but failed to surpass the 5 % threshold and often did not even qualify for a public subsidy. The Czech political scene has so far known only “independents“ who emphasised their non-partisan background, but ran on the ballots of other parties and enjoyed these parties’ support. A real advance for independent candidates was not ensured until the EP elections, when two entities got over the restrictive threshold. These were the Independents (NEZ), and the Association of Independents-European Democrats coalition (SNK-ED). The success of the independents was largely facilitated by the nomination of media personalities as leading candidates. Independent lists of candidates garnered a total of 20 % of the vote⁽¹⁰⁾ and can be declared the “winners“ of the European elections in the CZ. The Green Party (SZ), the Union of Liberal Democrats (ULD), and the Right Block (PB) found themselves below the threshold necessary for securing a mandate, yet gained entitlement to a public subsidy.⁽¹¹⁾

Table 1

An interesting point is the financial balance of the European elections, which were harmful to all standing political entities except for the Communists. The worst financial balance in the European elections (election campaign expenses balanced out by public subsidies granted on the basis of received votes) was reported by the ČSSD, which incurred a loss of CZK 24 mil., as a consequence of their approximately 30 mil. campaign and a poor election result. The ODS, with similar campaign expenses, ended up a mere CZK 9 mil. in the red. The European elections meant a distinct financial profit for the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (KSCM), which

relied on traditional voters and avoided costly media activities. It ranked high in the elections and consequently gained a net profit of CZK 9.5 mil. The elections represented a risk-free investment also for the two independent entities, which built their election campaign on well-known personalities.

3.3. Low voter turnout in the Czech Republic

The low voter turnout in EP elections is generally attributed to the rise of Euro-sceptic parties, the protest factor against the policies of national governments, and finally to the so-called democratic deficit in the EU (Schmitt and Eijk 2001; Flickinger, Studlar and Bennett 2003). Nevertheless, the decline in EU voter turnout to 45.7 % has not been steady, and has not always been directly related to national elections. Analysis of election results proves that voters in the EU Fifteen devoted the same attention to the current EP elections as in the past. The average turnout in the 15 member states, which had gradually decreased to 49.8 % by 1999, stabilised at 49.4 % in the 2004 elections. The increase in turnout was most apparent in Great Britain (+14.9 points), Ireland (+9.5 points), and the Netherlands (+9.1 points) (Flash Eurobarometer 2004). It is beyond doubt that the new member states are responsible for the overall unsatisfactory voter turnout of the first elections to be held in all the twenty-five countries. In terms of voters' failure to go to the polls, the CZ came fourth (following Slovakia, Poland and Estonia). The 28.32 % turnout of the Czech electorate was a universal surprise, as turnout in domestic elections has to date exceeded an absolute majority; moreover, participation in the referendum on the accession into the EU had supported the expectation of a higher voter turnout.⁽¹²⁾

The lack of interest of Czech voters in the EP elections can be explained by many factors. One of them is the impact of the present economic transformation on Czech citizens (Lequesne and Perottino 2004). 46 % of Czechs perceive the economic situation as worsening. They feel that they lack a stable and sufficient income, and 36 % are concerned about the financial stability of their household (Eurobarometer Czech Republic 2004). Unemployment, crime and the economic situation are seen as key concerns. In 2003, the national debt ratio reached CZK 493.2 bil. and the country is struggling to meet the convergence criteria. At the same time, however, indicators such as inflation, unemployment etc. approximate the Fifteen's average, and rank among the most favourable in the group of the new member states (cf. Czech Statistical Office). The question thus arises whether it is not appropriate to search for other reasons for Czech voters' disinterest in the EP elections.

Czech society has an ambivalent attitude towards European institutions. Data concerning the CZ has repeatedly fallen below the Twenty-five's average and frequently dropped to the very bottom of figures reported from the new member states. Czechs find themselves poorly informed about the EU, both in comparison with the EU average and in comparison with the new member states. Only 10 % of citizens believe that the EP directly affects their lives, 27 % assume a partial influence, and 38 % are convinced that the EP exerts no influence over them. At the same time, a total of 65 % of citizens agree with the statement that elections to the EP are really important (Eurobarometer Czech Republic 2004).⁽¹³⁾ Anxieties about the impact of accession are proportional to the lack of information. The better-informed Czechs consider themselves to be, the milder future risks they envision. Research shows that 52 % of Czechs lacked sufficient data to make an informed choice of a candidate, which is – after Poland – the second least favourable finding (Eurobarometer Czech Republic 2004).⁽¹⁴⁾

4. Election programmes and the phenomenon of populism

Political parties in the CZ differed fundamentally in their strategies toward voters. Programmes for the EP elections showed differences both in regard to the depth of analysis of individual problems, and in regard to their scope. Many parties, such as the ČSSD, NEZ and SNK-ED, did formulate election programmes but nevertheless did not actively promote them. Their campaign was limited to mass-media spots depicting popular personalities, without presenting concrete content. The selected attributes of populism defined as support of direct democracy, emphasis on social divisions in society, protectionism in relation to the national economy, and feeble support of minorities, were therefore very difficult to trace down. The election campaign in the first European elections did not focus on the fundamental issues defining the political camps. Differentiation between political entities was only marginally based on key political questions, and their attitudes concerning the EU were similarly unspecified. The parties' agenda on the EU was often limited to general proclamations about the importance of membership, and to repeating basic facts about the EU and its institutions. This applies both to the group of parliamentary

entities (members of the CZ Parliament after the 2002 elections) and non-parliamentary parties and movements.

4.1. Parliamentary entities ↑

4.1.1. Civic Democratic Party (ODS)

The ODS presented a highly refined and concrete programme “Blue Chance for Europe“ centred on a constitution for a flexible Europe consisting of states that are equal in status irrespective of their population size. The ODS called for preserving national fiscal, energy, healthcare, social and tax policies as a mean of assuring competition, and promoted liberalisation of world trade and a radical reform of the Common Agriculture Policy (CAP), among other reasons on account of the deformation of the third world’s export potential. The ODS takes a negative stance on the transitional periods imposed by the EU and on efforts to revise post-war legal acts. Proceeding from the specific situation of a country at the intersection of Europe’s main thoroughfares, the party called for a reassessment of the funding priorities under the Structural Funds, including their overall reform. It endorsed the commitment to meet the convergence criteria, including sanctions in the area of budgetary discipline, and demands for a referendum on the Euro. According to the ODS, security in Europe is built on co-operation within NATO, enhanced co-ordination among security organs in the fight against terrorism, and prompt integration of the CZ into the Schengen area. The party was among the radical critics of the EU Constitution⁽¹⁵⁾ (Blue Chance for Europe).

4.1.2. Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (KSČM) ↑

The party’s programme ”Social Europe, Europe for People“ aimed to respond to a number of concrete world threats, such as militarisation, the hegemony of the USA, and terrorism, and within this context it adopts a critical stance on the EU. The KSČM sees integration as an alternative to the domination of world powers. The party aims to fight the uncontrollable movement of capital, independence of the European Central Bank, bureaucratisation of European institutions, and negotiations on EU accession. The KSČM demanded a revision of the Stability pact and the imposition of a tax on the movement of capital and on contamination of the environment. The party advocates promoting trade unionism in the EU, encourage modern forms of employee participation in management, protecting employees against dismissals, and allowing labour migration only provided that the expectations of nationals have been met and their income secured. However, the party is against constructing any new ‘Iron Curtain’ in the East, and rejects racism, xenophobia, nationalism and discrimination. The Communists seek to abolish NATO, transfer NATO forces away from Europe, and implement a European safety scheme based on disarmament, non-military solutions, and a strong role for the UN (Social Europe, Europe for People).

4.1.3. Association of Independents-European Democrats coalition (SNK-ED) ↑

This coalition received media coverage primarily owing to the personality of the former Foreign Minister Josef Zielenec, who nonetheless presented himself as an independent candidate. The coalition advocated a rather general programme, aiming to earn trust and demonstrate solidity and alliance with the EU. The objective of the programme did not consist so much in specific items, but rather in the demonstration of candidates’ abilities to make use of new possibilities provided by European institutions. The SNK-ED advocated equal membership of all countries and rejected a two-speed Europe. It pointed out the limits of the negotiated accession conditions, and demonstrated an effort to take a stand against socialist experiments and nationalistic and xenophobic attitudes. According to the SNK-ED, Europe must commit to security as to an internal pillar of NATO and must co-operate with the USA (Election Programme of the SNK-ED).

4.1.4. Christian Democratic Union-People’s Party (KDU-ČSL) ↑

The vision that the Christian Democrats presented to the voters was very concrete. In their program the cornerstones of the new competitive Europe are education and research. The KDU-ČSL advocated the removal of administrative barriers to free enterprise, development of rural areas, and protection of the land. The party demands that direct taxes remain in the hands of member countries, and the funding from the Structural Funds target primarily environment and transportation systems. The KDU-ČSL takes a clear stance against abortion and

euthanasia. In response to negative demographic trends it prefers measures intended to raise the birth rate rather than immigration. The party demands the right of veto on issues related to the family in order to counter the redefinition of the family in favour of more liberal arrangements that acknowledge mere cohabitation of persons as being equal to the family. The party supports Europol and Eurojust and the fight against terrorism. As regards the Common Foreign and Security Policy, it stands for the formation of forces that can be used in humanitarian missions or in peace-enforcement. According to the KDU-ČSL, common protection of the EU must not pose a threat to NATO (Election Programme of the KDU-ČSL).

4.1.5. Czech Social Democratic Party (ČSSD) ↑

The Social Democrat's programme "Europe for People First" represents a general document that places the same emphasis on almost all the policies of the EU, thus rather evoking an encapsulation of basic facts about the EU. The ČSSD proceeded from the assumption that the CZ's greatest asset is a qualified labour force. Therefore it embraced the European social model and the principle of solidarity in the structural policy, without intending to reform the CAP. Greater attention was devoted to the commitment to take part in the installation of a zone of freedom, safety and law. The party demonstrated a willingness to stand for a closer co-operation among the secret services, the judiciary, and the police. It is worth mentioning that the Social Democrats in the CZ expressed a support for the EU Constitution (Social Europe, Europe for People).

4.1.6. Independents (NEZ) ↑

The list of candidates of the Independents was co-headed by two important personalities of the Czech media scene – the former General Director of the first CZ's private television network NOVA, Vladimír Železný, and the moderator and television editor, Jana Bobošíková, from the same channel. In both cases, the adopted strategy derived not from the electoral platform, but from the considerable media popularity of the candidates. Železný concentrated on a critique of the CAP, the re-distributive and non-competitive character of the EU, and on its democratic deficit. He is among the radical opponents of the EU Constitution. Jana Bobošíková's key priorities are regional development and unemployment (Mladá fronta DNES 16 April, 2004). The candidate also committed herself to redressing inadequately negotiated conditions of the CZ's accession to the EU and to channelling more funding to the country. Like Železný, she also rejects the EU Constitution, and particularly the idea of a EU Foreign Minister (Reflex 15 July, 2004).⁽¹⁶⁾

4.2. Other entities ↑

The analysis of populist tendencies can be extended to the group of entities that did not surpass the 5 % threshold, but at least qualified for the public subsidy. These are the SZ, ULD and PB.

4.2.1. Green Party (SZ)

In their programme the Green Party rejected the empty term "national interest" and presented a detailed and elaborate document on a range of concrete proposals. The programme centred on environmental issues, with an emphasis on the control of the CAP, production of cheap and organic food, prohibition of genetically modified food, changes in the area of transportation, strict control of dangerous chemicals, and a reversal of union policies towards the Third World countries. They call for equality for women, meaningful targeting of European funds, more support for elective European institutions, mandatory increase in expenditure on culture at a minimum of 1 % of national budgets, as well as more funding for science and research. The SZ supports further enlargement of the EU and the introduction of a "reasonable" common foreign and security policy aiming at an efficient and peaceful approach to settle conflicts, subject to approval by the UN. The Green Party embraces a lucid EU constitution that would contain provisions for holding an all-European referendum on the basis of a civic initiative (Vote for Green!).

4.2.2. Union of Liberal Democrats (ULD) ↑

Liberal Democrats criticized the EU's democratic deficit⁽¹⁷⁾ and set the removal of barriers to free movement of

persons as their paramount task. The party rejects xenophobia and religious intolerance. They supported stricter supervision over economic competition, embraced the Euro, the reform of the CAP, and the liberalisation of transportation services. The ULD declared ‘war’ on corruption and called for the simplification of European funds administration. It presented positions on the environment and sustainable development. The cornerstone of future security of the EU is seen in cooperation with the NATO (The Decalogue of the ULD).

4.2.3. Right Block (PB) ↑

The Right Block(18) presented itself as a party ready to combat non-democratic principles of decision-making and parliamentary parties. The party leader Petr Cibulka likens the situation in the CZ to “communist feudalism”. He regards Western European countries as oligarchic countries run by negative elites, the media as brainwashing factories resorting to Bolshevik practices, and the Brussels bureaucracy as an analogy of the USSR. Switzerland is considered a political role model, because it allows legislation to be overruled by referendum. The Right Block stands against increasing the country’s debt ratio. It has proposed a bill aiming against the concentration of undesirable persons and facilitating their detainment and deportation. It calls for tough police training, a free high-speed Internet, direct voting on matters of taxation, the introduction of ethical and moral education, and transformation of the army according to the principle of territorial militia. According to Cibulka, a presidential council consisting of intellectually and morally superior personalities should govern the state. Cibulka also rejects the very mechanism of elections. He does not approve of the 5 % threshold and believes the system of two polling days to be a convenient way to manipulate the results overnight (Election Programme of the PB).

5. Conclusion ↑

Was the phenomenon of populism in the CZ in the case of the European elections significant? This is a legitimate question, even though the main national populist SPR-RSČ did not retain its seats in the Chamber of Deputies after the 2002 parliamentary elections, and, despite its international support(19), suffered a crushing defeat in the EP elections.

The aim of this paper was to verify the occurrence of populist tendencies by tracing down selected attributes of populism and by conducting a qualitative analysis of the main programmes. In practice, election programmes are the only direct and undistorted source of party propositions. Subsequently, the goal was to find out whether it is the parliamentary (stronger) or non-parliamentary (weaker) parties that resort to populist arguments.

Study of election programmes showed that the occurrence of the attributes of populism fundamentally differs among individual parties within the spectrum of entities achieving at least 1 % of the vote. Partial traces of populism are apparent in the case of the KSČM which assumes a class division of the world and portrays itself as the patron of the oppressed working class. The party undoubtedly proceeds from its mistrust of European institutions and the free market. However, it rejects exclusion of certain population categories (i.e. religious, ethnic and national minorities), the protective fortification of the EU, and it does not show any of the other attributes either. In certain aspects, the ODS could likewise be considered populist, on the grounds of its rejection of supra-nationalism, or the KDU-ČSL which advocates boosting the birth rate rather than immigration, and takes a negative stance on homosexual cohabitation. Despite these partial signs, this category of successful parties cannot, however, be identified as representing strong populist tendencies. In fact neither the SNK-ED, nor even the NEZ, whose actions are commonly described as populist, show the defined attributes. In customary discourse, proclamations by the NEZ’s leader are often labelled as “populist”. This is, nevertheless, done without regard of analysing the contents of statements by representatives on this list of candidates, or even the election programme. It must be stated that the study of the programme in view of the selected criteria has not shown a link between the NEZ and populism. The NEZ’s statements can rather be characterised as a specific application of the principles of political marketing building on the media popularity of the movement’s key representatives. The fact that the NEZ, albeit generally perceived as a populist party, does not meet the defined criteria of populism, is among the most important findings of the conducted analysis. The picture changes if we extend the group of analysed entities to those parties which did not manage to secure the 5 % necessary for representation, but surpassed the level of 1 %. In this case, the PB headed by Petr Cibulka represents an unequivocally populist entity with regard to many of the selected attributes.

In summary, the questions posed in the introduction of this paper can be answered as follows. Despite conventional commentaries and assumptions, no major populist tendencies were present in the EP elections in the CZ. Where these tendencies did exist, the extent of such instances was limited and, except for the KSČM(20) , occurred only in the case of non-parliamentary parties. In the case of the PB these attributes are obvious, but without any real impact on the political scene in the CZ.

The CZ can be considered to be a country where populist tendencies were relatively inactive during the first elections to the EP. Parties that show considerable populist tendencies did not manage to pass the threshold. Nevertheless, populist parties are present in the CZ's political system, which – along with the fact that populism varies depending on the timing and purpose of political action and its manifestations – means that this state of affairs might not last forever. Reinforcement of the potential strength of populists even among parliamentary parties cannot be completely ruled out in the future.

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Endnotes

(1) This paper aims to analyse the link between election programmes of political parties in the electoral competition and signs of populism as they have so far been defined by political science. Our analysis hereafter draws a strict distinction between populism as a term defined in political science (as we will see in the text below), and populist statements and behaviour as presented in the media, for example, which often resort to exploitation and simplification of certain topics, taking advantage of the EU in order to stir up frenzy and disorientation. A major benefit of this research approach is the light it sheds on the generally misleading use of the term populism, as well as its contribution to tracing the possible presence of populism in the political spectrum participating in the European elections.

(2) For more details on the history and characteristics of SPR-RSČ see Mareš 2005.

(3) It is not the intention of this study to analyse media responses, but rather to apply these attributes directly to political parties. The focal point of analysis therefore is not the media profile of candidates standing for election, but their formally announced election programmes. Only these can be said to represent the official programme propositions approved by the candidates.

(4) The people as an entity can be defined as a civic or national group, or it can be understood to represent the country's poor, or another group of needy people defined according to different criteria.

(5) The fact that definitions of populism are just beginning to be articulated cannot represent a permanent stumbling block in the research of this problem field and cannot lead to passive perpetuation of the deformation of this term by general and media discourse. The four attributes proposed cannot, indeed, represent an exhaustive profile of a populist party. Yet they generally represent the key features that a party would have, if it was to be referred to as populist within political science.

(6) Typically, EP elections in the EU are based on proportional representation, commonly including closed lists of candidates and a set threshold.

(7) In the Czech Republic, elections are traditionally held on Friday between 2-10pm and on Saturday between 8am-2pm. Voters could only vote on the territory of the Czech Republic, and not for example at the country's embassies and representation abroad. The embassies are only authorised to issue voting certificates and update voter lists. The election campaign, in which parties were entitled to a total of 14 hours of free broadcasting time on public radio and television, was allowed to begin 16 days in advance of the first polling day. Publication of poll predictions are prohibited within 72 hours of election day. For details, see Šaradín et al. 2004.

(8) Elections to the other chamber of the parliament – the Senate of the CZ – are based on a two-round majority electoral system. Given the periodical replacement of a part of Senators, these elections are held at two-year intervals and are local. If the comparison of European elections with elections to the Chamber of Deputies is debatable, then in the case of the Senate it is impossible. However, it is a fact that senatorial elections resemble European elections in terms of voter turnout. Turnout in elections to the Senate declined from 35.03 % in 1996 to a mere 28.97 % in 2004.

(9) This concerns the following parties: Czech Social Democratic Party (ČSSD), Civic Democratic Party (ODS), Right Block (PB), Democratic Union (DEU), Civic Democratic Alliance (ODA), Christian Democratic Union-People's Party (KDU-ČSL), Pensioners/Party for Security in Life (DSŽJ), Green Party (SZ), and Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (KSČM). However, PB, SZ and DSŽJ have repeatedly failed to gain seats in the parliament.

(10) These groups were of only temporary character and were politically ambiguous. Both of the independent lists of candidates dissolved several months after the elections. In the EP these independents joined different fractions.

(11) The elections simplified the political scene in a major way. Only 9 entities reached the public subsidy of CZK 30 per received vote, granted to parties that have secured over 1 % of the vote: ODS, ČSSD, KDU-ČSL, SNK-ED coalition, SZ, PB, ULD, KSČM and the Independents. The other parties garnered, for the most part, less than half of one percent of the vote, and thus failed absolutely. The threshold for selecting parties to be included in this study of populist attributes in election programmes was set at 1 % of the vote. The rationale behind this decision was to avoid analysing completely irrelevant parties, while still being able to map possible occurrence of the phenomenon of populism beyond the parliamentary grounds.

(12) The voter turnout in the elections to the Chamber of Deputies was 76.41 % in 1996, 74.03 % in 1998, and 58 % in 2002. The referendum on the accession to the EU took place on June 13-14, 2003 and the voter turnout was 55.2 %.

(13) Political parties in the CZ do not enjoy much trust. Czechs put most trust in the media (59 %) and the least trust in political parties (10 %) (Eurobarometer Czech Republic, 2004). 66 % of Czechs do not have any direct contact with any political party (Flash Eurobarometer, 2004).

(14) Overall, 80 % of Czechs noticed no general non-partisan information campaign about the elections to the EP. A total of 40 % received no information by means of direct printed materials, and 37 % did not come across any information about the campaign in any printed materials. A mere 4 % of citizens actively sought information about the EU from information centres or at public meetings (Eurobarometer Czech Republic, 2004).

(15) This term is used in this text to refer to the document ‘Treaty Establishing a Constitution for Europe’.

(16) The deputy Bobošíková refused to join the fraction run by ultra-right wing parties such as the League of Polish Families, the French National Front, Belgian Flemish Block, and the Italian North League. The group thus failed to meet the numerical condition for constituting a fraction in 2004.

(17) The ULD submitted a number of concrete institutional bills, such as the introduction of a bicameral European parliament with an upper chamber in the form of the European Council, and assembling the Commission on the basis of the European election results.

(18) The correct name of the party is the Political Party of Petr Cibulka Right Block – a party for the RECALLABILITY of politicians, REFERRENDUM and DIRECT democracy. For abbreviating the first two words of the name and failing to use the capital letters, Cibulka filed a suit against the Ministry of the Interior and the daily newspapers MFDnes and Lidové noviny.

(19) During the European campaign, J.M. le Pen and V. Zirinovskij paid a supportive visit to Dr. Sládek and his party the SPR-RSČ. Even so, the party only garnered 0.67 % of the vote .

(20) As a matter of interest it can be stated that Taggart and Szczerbiak described the KSČM as the only representative of “hardline euroscepticism” (Taggart and Szczerbiak 2002).

Table I

Election results

Candidates	Total seats in the European Parliament	% of vote received	Position on the political spectrum (based on party and election programmes)
ODS	9	30.04	right-wing
KSČM	6	20.26	radical left-wing
SNK-ED	3	11.02	centre-right
KDU-ČSL	2	9.57	centre-right
ČSSD	2	8.78	left-wing
NEZ	2	8.18	centre-right *
SZ	-	3.16	centre
ULD	-	1.69	right-wing
PB	-	1.17	radical right-wing

Source: author according to the Ministry of the Interior of the CZ

(For more details on the results and the course of the European elections compare Šaradin et al. 2004. For a more detailed description of political parties in 2004 see Malíř and Marek et al. 2005).

* The NEZ limited their campaign largely to meetings and debates where they emphasised the non-partisan character of the movement. Their election programme is non-standard, crystallised solely around proclamations by the two main leaders on specific single issues concerning the integration process. Therefore it is not possible to position the movement on the right-left axis on the basis of the contents of their programme. Hence their position given in the table must be considered as approximate.