

“SAYONARA, OKAMURA:”

A STUDY OF THE ILL-FATED CZECH FAR RIGHT



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Abstract

In the wake of Europe's current economic and migrant crises, some once-fringe, far-right parties have risen in popularity across the continent (such as VVD in the Netherlands and the National Front in France). However, these have not taken root in the Czech Republic, where far-right parties have enjoyed limited success (especially in comparison with their counterparts in nearby Poland and Hungary). This thesis examines the success of the post-2012 Czech far right, particularly under the direction of Tomio Okamura. Although Okamura's party 'Freedom and Direct Democracy' may enjoy a level of success similar to that of 1990s politician Miroslav Sládek, the far right will stay marginal in the following years, because mainstream Czech parties have social agendas similar to what might be expected of the far right in older western democracies. The success of leaders such as Andrej Babiš and Miloš Zeman shows that appeals to populism and xenophobia is not the electoral territory of fringe parties (as it is in Western European states)—this means that their political space is unavailable to far-right (or far-left) competition. In this study, the success of Okamura's party is quantified through electoral data, public opinion polls and activity on social media, and qualified through analysis of rhetoric used by politicians and a *longue durée* approach to Czech history. This research can be a valuable tool in our understanding of the changing nature of politics in post-communist states, and therefore how to engage with them as actors in the European Union and on the international stage.

Contents

Introduction	7
A: Research Question	7
B: Literature Review – Democracy in the Region	9
C: Methodology	13
D: Outline	14
Chapter I. Czech Politics and the rise of Okamura.....	15
1.1 – Biography	15
1.2 – Czech Political Landscape.....	17
1.3 – Okamura’s politics – Dawn and SPD	22
Chapter II. Populism and Okamura	28
2.1 – Definition of the phenomenon	28
2.2 – Populism in Czech Politics	31
2.3 – Okamura’s Brand.....	38
Chapter III. Anti-Foreigner Sentiments.....	48
3.1 – Xenophobia as a Far-Right Ideology.....	48
3.2 – Okamura and Muslims.....	51
3.4 – Czech Opposition to the EU	55
Conclusion – Beyond the Czech Republic	60
Bibliography	64

List of Figures

Figure 1 – Okamura advertising his business	16
Figure 2 – The Art of Direct Democracy (2013)	17
Figure 3 – An SPD poster	25
Figure 4 – May 2017 Polling by focus-agency.cz, placing Okamura at 4.4%	26
Figure 5 – May 2017 Polling by Median, placing Okamura at 5.0%	26
Figure 6 – Babiš urinating in public at a concert	36
Figure 7 – Okamura with a handicapped person, posted on his Instagram	39
Figure 8 – Okamura working out, posted on his Instagram	39
Figure 9 – One of Okamura's YouTube videos	40
Figure 10 – Themes of Okamura's tweets per month	41
Figure 11 – Okamura with Western European far-right leaders	43
Figure 12 – Voter participation in the 2013 presidential election	45
Figure 13 – Percentage of Germans living in Czech lands prior to 1945	46
Figure 14 – One of Okamura's YouTube videos	52
Figure 15 – Presidents Zeman and Putin meet in Moscow	59

List of Tables

Table 1 – Major Czech Political Parties	5
Table 2 – Comparison of Okamura and Sládek	27
Table 3 – Followers for each party's official social media pages	38

Glossary

- *Far right* – in the post-communist region, it typically means opposing further EU integration and Western norms on accepting refugees, abortion, homosexual marriage, etc.; far-right parties typically advocate strengthening ties with Russia.
- *Extreme right (or radical right)* – seeking to destroy all forms of government and civil rights; fascist
- *Populist* – see section 2.1
- *Illiberal* – see *far right*.
- *Chamber of Deputies* – upper, more powerful house of the bicameral Parliament that controls aspects of government such as the budget.
- *Senate* – lower house of the bicameral Parliament, home to more independent candidates.
- *President* – figurehead of the Czech government with relatively weak powers.

Table 1 - Major Czech Political Parties.

Party		Representation			Party Leader	Years Active	Ideology
		Chamber of Deputies	Senate	Regions			
Czech Social Democratic Party <i>Česká Strana Sociálně Demokratická</i>	ČSSD	50	35	125	Prime Minister Bohuslav Sobotka	1878–1948; 1989–present	Centre-left; Member of governing coalition.
Action of Dissatisfied Citizens <i>Akce Nespokojených Občanů</i>	ANO 2011	47	4	0	Andrej Babiš	2012–present	Centre-right; led by populist leader Andrej Babiš. Member of governing coalition.
Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia <i>Komunistická Strana Čech a Moravy</i>	KSČM	33	1	114	Vojtěch Filip	1989–present	Far-left; has never been a part of any government coalition since 1989. Member of opposition.
Tradition Responsibility Prosperity <i>Tradice Odpovědnost Prosperita</i>	TOP 09	26	1	12	Miroslav Kalousek	2009–present	Centre-left
Civic Democratic Party <i>Občanská Demokratická Strana</i>	ODS	16	15	180	Petr Fiala	1991–present	Centre-right; Member of opposition

Christian and Democratic Union – Czechoslovak People’s Party <i>Křesťanská a Demokratická Unie – Československá Strana Lidová</i>	KDU-ČSL	14	10	56	Pavel Bělobrádek	1992–present	Centre-right; Member of governing coalition.
Dawn – National Coalition (Formerly Dawn of Direct Democracy)	Dawn	7	0	0	Miroslav Lidinský	2013–present	Far-right (see section 1.3)
Freedom and Direct Democracy <i>Svoboda a přímá demokracie</i>	SPD	3	0	34	Tomio Okamura	2015–present	Far-right (see section 1.3)
Public Affairs <i>Věci Veřejné</i>	VV	0	0	0	Radek John	2001–2015 (rose to prominence in 2009)	Centre-right (see section 2.2)
Coalition for the Republic – Republican Party of Czechoslovakia <i>Sdružení pro Republiku - Republikánská strana Československa</i>	SPR–RSČ / Republicans	0	0	0	Miroslav Sládek	1990–1998	Far-right (see section 1.2)

Introduction

A: Research Question

Since the collapse of the Czech Republic's communist regime in 1989, many small parties have come and gone, and consistently throughout these years, far-right parties have performed poorly, with the exception of Miroslav Sládek's 'Coalition for the Republic' (SPR–RSC) in the 1990s. In the aftermath of the 2008 global financial crisis, the two largest parties—centre-left Czech Social Democratic Party (ČSSD) and centre-right Civic Democratic Party (ODS)—lost their erstwhile grip on power, allowing new political figures to rise. One of these is Czech-Japanese businessman-turned-politician Tomio Okamura, who has become the most successful far-right candidate in two decades. Although he has gained popularity in recent years (assisted by his stance on the migration crisis), relatively little has been hitherto published on Okamura's electoral success.

Tomio Okamura is, in the words of one scholar, a “mouthy and aggressive populist [who lays] into minorities and elites with alacrity” (SeanHanley.org.uk, 2015). In 2012, he formed a party, ‘Dawn of Direct Democracy,’ which won 14 seats in the Chamber of Deputies. A dispute over finances soon followed and, in 2015, Okamura left to form a new party called ‘Freedom and Direct Democracy’ (SPD). SPD is a far-right party founded upon Okamura's anti-immigrant and anti-establishment stances. As of May 2017, SPD is polling between 4% and 7%, suggesting it will gain seats in the opposition for the next Czech parliament, which will be elected in October 2017 (Dawn, meanwhile, has sunk in the polls and seems destined to be forgotten).

The purpose of this thesis is—using data from past Czech elections and the current political landscape—to gauge the prospects of electoral success for SPD and, by extension, other far-right parties in the Czech Republic. The speedy rise and fall of Dawn is symptomatic of the problems that these parties have faced; understanding the reasons for the electoral weakness of the far right (and extreme right) helps to understand the phenomenon of Tomio Okamura. Hanley argues that the potential for a far-right party to gain governing power in the Czech parliament is around 8%¹ (2014, 164)—this means that, although Okamura may enjoy relative success in the 2017 election, it is unlikely that his ‘Freedom and Direct Democracy’ movement will change the course of Czech politics (in a fashion similar to how UKIP changed British politics after its performance in the 2015 general election).

The hypothesis I propose here is that, due to domestic turmoil both political (a legacy of the global financial crisis) and social (a legacy of the European migration crisis), the far right is currently faring marginally better, but Tomio Okamura will not be an agent who shifts Czech politics further to the right. In the Czech Republic, parties such as SPD are in low demand because mainstream parties address voters’ illiberal desires. I will demonstrate that established Czech politicians acknowledge the issues that are the agenda of the far right in Western democracies: they claim to fight a disconnected, corrupt elite, oppose the EU, and take issue with the influx of foreigners, especially Muslims.

Okamura seems headed towards the fate of Miroslav Sládek, who gained electoral victories during the early 1990s but faded from the picture at the end of the decade. The

¹ Based on research by the Czech Ministry of the Interior (2010) and Hungary’s Political Capital think-tank (2014) (which used somewhat different measures and methodologies).

aforementioned crises have created social unrest and anxiety, and thus it is unsurprising that a populist figure has appeared to capitalise on them politically. Due to the limited scope of this work, it does not systematically study all far- or extreme-right Czech politicians, as none have reached the success of Okamura (for a study of that nature, cf. Mareš 2011).

This research is important for a number of reasons. First, many observers are keenly interested in party development and democratic transition in the post-communist states of the European Union (EU). The erosion of the rule of law in Hungary (under Viktor Orbán's ruling 'Fidesz' party) and Poland (under Jarosław Kaczyński's ruling 'Law and Justice' [PiS]) have generated concern of a contagion of far-right parties sweeping through Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), undoing the region's progress towards liberal democracy. Phenomena in these countries affect not only the CEE region, but also the larger Western world; it is therefore worth evaluating whether a similar illiberal, far-right insurgency is impending in the Czech Republic. Second, this research is significant because it contributes to the growing literature on far-right politics (historical and current) and their causes.

B: Literature Review – Democracy in the Region

If, as I posit, far-right parties are unsuccessful because mainstream parties are also illiberal, it is important to understand what scholars have written about democracy in the CEE region. This thesis operates under the presumption that issues that are far-right in Western Europe are centrist in the post-communist states; when the literature in this section mentions the far right, it is from a western European perspective. Therefore, although parties such as Fidesz and PiS are considered far-right by Western standards, they are mainstream

by standards of the East (in this case, centre-right). It is also important to understand the following distinction: the far right works within the political system and the extreme right tries to destroy it. Extreme right parties are similar to the fascists of the interwar era, and are overwhelmingly unpopular in Eastern Europe as well as the West.

During the decade after the fall of the communism, all CEE countries appeared to be consolidating western-style democracies—for example, the accession of most of them to the EU seemed to confirm that the transformation was complete. However, Dawson and Hanley write that, despite appearances, in the states of CEE “there is an absence of genuinely liberal political platforms,” by which they mean “a range of mainstream ideologies of both the left and right based on shared commitments to the norms of political equality, individual liberty, civic tolerance, and the rule of law” (2016, 21). These norms simply have not been internalised, and even apparently-solid party organisations in CEE have a hollow, ineffective ‘Potemkin-like’ quality (Hanley 2015).

Thus, when scholars write of ‘democratic rollback’ in CEE (Agh 2010; Grzegorz, Kubik and Vachudova, 2007; Merkel 2010; Mungiu-Pippidi 2007; Plattner and Diamond 2007; Rupnik 2007), they should instead focus on the resurgence of communist-era norms that were never overcome. Dawson and Hanley note that illiberalism, “represented by both entrenched economic elites and latent forces of national and social conservatism, had never actually gone away during the period of ‘liberal consensus’ and was thus *already established* in the mainstream” (2016, 21; italics in original). Krastev (2007) wrote on the death of this so-called liberal ‘consensus’—he argues that it was “an elite project driven by small groups at the apex of politics, business, academia, and officialdom” (Hanley and Dawson, 2016, 2) aimed towards implementing more open, liberal models of trade, immigration, and society;

the whole project seems to have been more popular in the minds of the elite than amongst the populace.

Some historical factors explain this lack of liberal democratic consolidation. Pop-Eleches argues that historical legacies—such as lack of urban development, lack of pre-1989 independent statehood, having been part of an empire for many centuries, and, of course, communism—play the most important role in post-communist states’ prospects for “democratization and democratic deepening” (2007, 909; cf. Toole, 2007).²

Parties in CEE countries often also failed to develop depth beyond surface slogans and politicians failed to inspire citizens to develop meaningful civil society (see section 2.2). Havlík and Hloušek (2014) note that as a consequence of centrist parties’ failures, they have declined (a prime example being ODS) and populist parties are on a steady rise (see section 2.1). Rohrschneider and Whitefield “conservatively estimate that 45% of West European voters and just under 54% of Central and Eastern Europe voters are independent floating voters who do not identify with any party” (Hanley 2015, 302); these figures are rising as traditional parties are losing power.

Under the dual stress of the financial and migration crises, the latent illiberalism manifested itself as moderate centre-left and centre-right parties lost popularity and national politics swung to the right. Evans writes that “the post-materialist value-change in post-industrial societies among the younger, more educated and socio-economically more secure strata is also generating a backlash, in the form of a socially conservative, authoritarian and

² That said, the role of communist legacies “tends to become progressively diluted, as post-communist polities move into the 21st century and face new political-economic and socio-cultural challenges” (Bustikova and Kitschelt 2009, 46).

ethnocentric ideology,” which far-right parties promote (Ignazi, 1992)” (2005). In the parliamentary elections in Hungary in 2014 and Poland in 2015, right-wing ideologues in Fidesz and PiS took a more authoritarian turn (see conclusion for details). Despite the setbacks, the emergence of far-right parties is a sign of growing democracy, for they are a backlash against the liberalism that is a product of transition. Mudde (2000) discusses how radical right parties abide by a belief system that does not share the values of the political order within which they operate, for which reason they may threaten the rule of law (as Kaczyński and Orbán are doing—see conclusion for more detail) (Bugaric, 2008).

Kalb (2009) is not surprised that far-right parties have surged in popularity; he notes that far-right parties appeal to people disenfranchised with the post-1991 global order, and the undermining of state sovereignty by globalisation. Moreover, Makovicky is “sympathetic to more recent readings of the rise of post-socialist political populism—generally identified as right-wing nationalism—as a defensive response by working-class people to the silences imposed by liberal rule” (2013, 79). Far-right (and also far-left) parties appeal to young people disenfranchised by the system of society; the electorate of Okamura’s Dawn in 2013 was “younger than average” (Cisář and Štětka 2017, 293). Young people are disproportionately affected by unemployment, thus some may vote for right-wing parties that promise to improve the lot of the underrepresented. Evans writes that the far-right attitude-set appeals to “a less educated and socio-economically insecure stratum, particularly among younger voters with low skill marketability and vulnerable to competition from low-cost foreign labour markets. ... During the 1990s, the age profile of far-right voters has seen an increasing shift towards younger cohorts (Betz and Immerfall, 1998, 19ff)” (2005, 79). In the Czech Republic, unemployment is remarkably low (the lowest in the EU), which

possibly deters would-be far-right voters.

Other scholars take issue with pessimistic analyses of democracy in CEE: Dryzek and Holmes believe that Czech democracy functions better than its historical past would suggest. Their argument does not deny the importance of political histories—however, they “reject cultural path-dependency, and challenge the view that CEE countries ... are almost necessarily doomed not to consolidate democracy because they do not really have a republican democratic tradition (the deep cultural determinist argument)” (2000, 1044). Bustikova and Kitschelt also challenge the idea that Czech politicians are ‘inherently illiberal’—they claim that “the study of economic grievances, when matched with ethnic and socio-cultural attributes of party competition, is one of the avenues to account for radical right party success and failure over time” (2009, 60).

Czech democracy is complicated enough to warrant optimistic and pessimistic interpretations, but I believe that Dryzek and Holmes’ argument is outdated, given the challenges to Czech democracy since 2012 in particular. I am sympathetic to the argument of Dawson and Hanley, because the Czech far right would perform better in western democracies than in CEE, where its positions are already mainstream. Many of my arguments build upon the research of Dr Seán Hanley of University College London, the most prolific scholar of Czech politics in English-language academia.

C: Methodology

The primary sources of analysis shall be voting records (compiled by the Czech Statistical office), opinion polling by Czech polling agencies (CVVM, Median, Stem.cz,

Focus-agency.cz, and Eurobarometer) and statements made by Okamura and other Czech politicians, as reported in newspapers or posted on their own websites or social media profiles. Selected primary sources have been translated from Czech by the author.

Qualitative methods are also used and are based on a *longue durée* historical approach. My primary source of analysis of Okamura's rhetoric is his Twitter account, namely the 642 tweets he posted between August 2013 (when he joined Twitter) and April 2017. This source should not readily be dismissed based on its provenance, but, as I suggest, this is the most important source of insight into his campaign. Much of the content he tweets is also re-posted on his Facebook profile and YouTube channel. Okamura's posts on Instagram are primarily of a personal nature, but also convey his political philosophy.

D: Outline

Chapter 1 discusses the figure of Okamura and situates him the broad landscape of Czech politics, including the figure of Miroslav Sládek. This chapter focuses on his forays into Czech politics since 2012; the 1990s and 2000s will be dealt with only shortly. Chapters 2 and 3 discuss the ideologies under which Okamura (and other Czech politicians operate): populism, and wariness of foreigner rhetoric. The conclusion places the Czech political scene in a regional context, comparing and contrasting with other CEE countries.

Chapter I. Czech Politics and the rise of Okamura

1.1 – Biography

Tomio Okamura was born in 1972 in Tokyo to a half-Japanese, half-Korean father, and a mother from the Zlín region in Moravia (the eastern half of the Czech Republic). He first came to Czechoslovakia when he was six years old, and has since become wholly fluent in the Czech language. Despite looking markedly different from most Czechs, he has transitioned to become a full participant in the country's culture and customs. In January 2012, it was reported that Okamura was dating a 20-year-old Czech student, and tabloid press enjoyed covering this; he has always enjoyed a close relationship with the tabloids (especially *Parlamentní Listy* [Parliament Journals], which covers some of his more outrageous statements) (Souček, 2016).

Okamura started his business career in 1994, mainly focussing on the industries of gastronomy and tourism. He has economic links with a number of businesses, including the Association of Czech Travel Agencies (where he was vice-president), and has been a judge on the Czech version of BBC television programme “Dragons’ Den.” Before becoming a politician, Okamura was a marginal figure who “seems effortlessly to have reinvented as lifestyle guru and purveyor and packager of Japanese culture for the Czech consumer” (Seánhanley.org.uk, 2015).

Figure 1: Okamura advertising his business (posted on his Instagram, January 2017).



His first foray into Czech politics was writing a book in the spring of 2011 titled *The Art of Governance* (before he held any elected office). Before establishing his party, Okamura was vocal in public discourse, publishing other books on governance and promoting direct democracy as “a corrective to the corrupted regime of representative democracy” (REPHRASE). In 2013 he wrote *Umění přímé demokracie – The Art of Direct Democracy*, in which Okamura shares his ideas for direct democracy. This idea for ‘direct’ or ‘true’ democracy has become the hallmark of his political career.

Figure 2: The Art of Direct Democracy (2013).



1.2 – Czech Political Landscape

The purpose of this section is to demonstrate the milieu that existed before Okamura entered politics. During his years as a businessman, politics were dominated by ODS and ČSSD. Since their founding in 1991 by Václav Klaus, the Civic Democrats were in power 1996–1998, 2007–2009, and 2010–2013. Their agenda is based on neoliberal Thatcherism and Reaganism, weakening the role of the state in the economy.³ Unlike in Hungary and Poland, where the largest centre-right parties overtook all competition, ODS never became

³ Okamura is sympathetic to their economic platform, and has quoted Reagan several times in his tweets (4 June 2015, 20 July 2015).

the central party; it was an agent within Czech politics instead of a dominating force because it “failed to gain the levels of support or concentration of the centre-right achieved by Hungary’s Fidesz through alliance building and the absorption of smaller organizations” (Hanley 2004, 3). Saxonberg argues that, in the 1990s and 2000s, the Czech centre-right was balanced by the left because charismatic leaders did not “pursue alternatives to party formation. By contrast, the relatively powerful, directly elected presidency in Poland, led a charismatic leader such as [Lech] Wałęsa to avoid founding or consistently supporting a party” (in Hanley 2004, 39-40).⁴

The Social Democrats provided a strong left-wing counter to ODS, leading the parliament coalition 1998–2006, and 2014–present. Handl and Goffin note that, in the 1996 election, ČSSD were “the first avowedly left-wing party without a communist past to gain major electoral support in post-communist history” (2016, 127). Hanley writes that, until quite recently, the Czech Republic was one of the few CEE democracies that appeared to have “succeeded in building working approximations of Western European-style party systems”; the country had a stable set of core parties “with recognisable and consistent ideologies (conservatives, Social Democrats, Christian Democrats, Communists) which, to varying degrees, had laid down organizational roots in society (Deegan-Krause 2006; Deegan-Krause and Haughton 2010; Linek and Lyons 2013)” (2014, 166). However, on issues such as immigration, the parties were not so different and both had “strong cultural conservatism” (Cisár and Štětka 2017, 290).⁵

⁴ This model changed in the late 2000s, as more personality-dominated politics have become the norm (see section 2.2).

⁵ Václav Havel, the Czech Republic’s first president, was more socially liberal. He apologised for parts of Czechoslovakia’s past, such as the infamous Beneš decrees, which led to the expulsion of 3 million Sudeten

ODS and ČSSD have been periodically challenged by smaller parties, but Mareš (2011) notes that parties further right than ODS have been particularly marginal. As mentioned in the introduction, Miroslav Sládek's Republicans were the most popular. This party was founded in 1989. As the economy was privatised and thousands of people faced unemployment for the first time in their lives, they sought to blame others for their problem (see section 3.1). Hanley describes that in 1990 the Republicans developed a "distinct brand of right-wing politics combining ... ultra-radical, conspiracy-minded anti-communism and a pallet of anti-elite, chauvinistic, and racist themes" (Hanley 2012, 69). They argued for the defence of Czech interests against the West (particularly in the face of a post-1990 reunited Germany, and fears that Sudeten Germans would return for the property they lost after World War II) and "tough measures against the Roma minority as a (supposed) source of crime and disorder"; for this racism the party became best known (Hanley 2012, 70). Hanley describes Sládek as a classic populist:

"[He] framed the distinction between the people and the elite as a moral one, between the decent and hardworking majority and a corrupt and indolent minority using its monopoly on political power dishonestly to enrich itself in the privatization process, both directly and by serving foreign interests" (2012, 75).

The years 1990–1992 were marked by social confusion, which helped Sládek gain power. In the 1992 parliamentary election, the Republicans won 6% of the national vote, and in the 1996 election they peaked at 8%, thus enjoying representation in parliament 1992–1998. Their success, however, was short-lived: in the 1998 elections, the party fell to 3.5% of the vote and lost their position in government. Sládek lost power because in 1998, the country fell into a minor recession and they proved inept at improving people's economic

Germans after 1945 (Havel, 1995).

wellbeing. Exit polling suggested that the Republicans' racist rhetoric failed to win over sceptical first-time voters and many younger, less educated male voters, who had previously supported the Republicans, "turned in 1998 to ČSSD, who offered a more credible and professional solution to the economic issues of pressing concern to such groups (Kreidl and Vlachová 2000)" (Hanley 2012, 71). Because populists usually have imprecise positions and their parties are built on the charisma of a particular leader, they tend to perform better in elections than in office; in other words, they say what will get them elected, not what is easy to pull off (cf. Heinisch, 2003); Sládek's inability to deliver on promises to increase people's wealth led to his electoral failure in 1998. He was also found guilty of appropriating money to finance his own lifestyle and arrested right before the election; this was especially damning as his campaign had promised to fight corruption (hypocritical corruption is a problem seen again amongst Czech populists—see section 2.1).

Sládek regrouped into a new party, 'Republicans of Miroslav Sládek' (RMS), but it failed to attract voters (winning only 0.9% during the 2002 legislative election), and in 2013 it was dissolved. Tomio Okamura will probably fade from national politics as Miroslav Sládek did, provided that the Czech social scene settles (especially with regards to migration), as it did in the late 1990s. Between the Republicans and Dawn, various far-right parties rose and fell without making it into either house of Parliament (but with some representation on the regional level). Several extreme-right parties are still active in the fourteen administrative regions (such as the Workers' Party [DS]), but they have negligible support at the national level (cf. Hanley, 2014).

Another aspect of Czech politics that obstructs the success of the far right is the durability of the far left, manifest in the official Communist Party (KSČM). Bustikova and

Kitschelt write, “in countries with a legacy of national-accommodative communism, which have cushioned losers of reforms through their relatively generous welfare states, the potential for distinctive radical right parties has always been limited” (2009, 460). Handl and Goffin note that the KSČM is “the only communist party in East-Central Europe that flourished after the end of the Eastern Bloc without changing its name or giving up its anti-capitalist, anti-liberal and anti-Western appeals” (2016, 127). In terms of membership, KSČM is the largest political party in the Czech Republic and in terms of parliamentary representation it is third. (cf. March and Keith, 2016). The enduring presence of centre-left ČSSD—which occupies second place in polling for the October 2017 election—keeps the right from monopolising politics, as they do in Poland and Hungary. In May 2017, for example, PM Sobotka feigned resignation to force President Zeman to dismiss Babiš as finance minister, thus showing the left still has power.

Thanks to the Czech Republic’s industrial tradition, there has always been a strong working class that developed into leftist unions (even as early as the Imperial [Austrian] era). Thanks to the unions, in the 1930s-40s the Czech lands did not have a central fascist or other far-right element (unlike Slovakia, Poland, or Hungary) that could rear its head post-communist era. For example, upon the dissolution of Czechoslovakia in 1993 (the ‘Velvet Divorce’), there was never a thought that the Czechs would fight to prevent the Slovaks from seceding. Hanley sums it up:

“[The Czech lands] were an unlikely setting for the emergence of a strong centre-right. In contrast to Hungary and Poland, where the post-1989 right was able to draw on powerful traditions of populism, conservative nationalism and political Catholicism dating back to the nineteenth century, ‘right wing’ forces in the Czech lands were historically weak and divided. Czech party development before 1938 broadly conformed to the pattern of cleavage-based party formation seen in Western Europe ... the social forces that formed the bases of the traditional right in many

European countries, such as conservative aristocratic landowners or the Catholic Church, were politically weak or absent in the Czech case” (2004, 34-35).

Although the communists perform well in elections (in 2013, they took 3rd place with 15% of the vote), due to their historical baggage they have never been invited to form part of a coalition government, and have hitherto been consigned to function as an opposition party.

1.3 – Okamura’s politics – Dawn and SPD

Okamura entered politics in 2012, a time when the traditional party dichotomy was breaking down and a new era in Czech politics began. Okamura’s pre-established popularity in business and as an author helped him to surpass the electoral threshold, and in the October 2012 Senate election he won a seat as an independent candidate. Immediately after his victory in the election to the Senate, he announced his intention to run in the 2013 presidential election (the first year the president was elected directly). Any independent could be nominated if he or she collected 50,000 signatures; Okamura’s campaign submitted a list of 61,500 signatures, but a court found half of the signatures fraudulent and his candidacy was refused.⁶ After this unsuccessful venture, he decided to focus on forming a party and getting into the Chamber of Deputies.

The ODS government (2010-2013) collapsed in popularity after implementing unpopular austerity measures, and a scandal in which Prime Minister Petr Nečas was found guilty of bribery and abusing the secret service to cover up an affair. The government collapsed in 2012 and in snap elections were held in 2013, wherein Okamura’s Dawn received 342,339

⁶ For the upcoming 2018 presidential election, he has signalled no intention to run; rather, he supports incumbent president Miloš Zeman (with whom he shares similar ideology—see section 2.3).

total votes cast (7%) and gained 14 seats; forming part of the opposition alongside ODS, Dawn, and KSCM. The centre-left coalition government was formed by ČSSD, ANO 2011 and the Christian Democrats; Bohuslav Sobotka of ČSSD was appointed Prime Minister in January 2014.

With his entrepreneurial experience, Okamura saw an opportunity to “run the state like a business” (Hanley 2016), but changed tack when that pitch was taken by an actual tycoon, Slovak billionaire Andrej Babiš (interestingly another non-politician, and outsider in terms of ethnic identity; he will be discussed further in section 2.2). Although the structure of Okamura’s programme is similar to Babiš’s, he is more concerned with the culturally-defined nation than with business-like effectiveness; “as a result, his public discourse is aimed against foreign elements in the Czech nation and immigration in general” (Cisár and Štětka 2017, 288–289). As a self-made businessman, he appeals to the Czech people’s obsession with individual success as defining a person’s worth—to his voters, “anybody who appears in a socially difficult situation is to be personally blamed for it ... He or she is unadaptable, a label generally used for unemployed, poor, or socially excluded people, often ethnicised in the form of the Roma community” (Cisár and Štětka 2017, 288–289).

Due to infighting over the finances and leadership of Dawn, in early 2015 Okamura left the party, accompanied by some loyal deputies. Following his exit, the party changed its name to ‘Dawn – National Coalition’, but without Okamura’s charisma, its support has plummeted; as of May 2017, Dawn is polling at a dismal 14th place (1.1%). The party’s ails resemble those of Sládek: shortly after arriving in Parliament in 1992, “the Republicans’ faction quickly fragmented; nine of the fourteen federal deputies, elected in 1992, broke with the party” (Hanley 2012, 70). This factional infighting reflects the fragility of these far-right parties.

After leaving Dawn, Okamura formed ‘Freedom and Direct Democracy,’ a political grouping named after the Eurosceptic European Parliament political group ‘Europe of Freedom and Direct Democracy.’ After registration, SPD attracted 9,000 membership applications in the first three months. It marked a break with the ideology proposed in Dawn, focusing more on the defence of Czech national interests against the EU, and tightening immigration laws. Okamura shows a direct adaptation to the current broader European dilemmas—in 2013–2014, Dawn’s agenda was not anti-migrant (even though he had made his own personal statements on migrants), rather the main agenda was anti-corruption and direct democracy. Beginning in the summer of 2015, as hundreds of immigrants came to the Czech Republic, Okamura’s rhetoric came to be dominated by anti-Muslim messages. His focus on this topic earned him the reputation in the press as a politically-incorrect messenger of the uncomfortable truth; this reputation has earned him a high level of popular trust. A March 2017 poll published on Novinky.cz from CVVM found that Okamura is the second most-trusted Czech politician (35%)—only behind Babiš (46%), and higher than PM Sobotka (34%) (Novinky.cz); an April 2017 poll also found him the fourth most-popular politician (Stem.cz, 2017). Through an active social media presence (see section 2.2), Okamura has crafted a strong charisma and positive cult of personality.

The feeling that people have been left without a voice has brought about the success of calls for ‘direct democracy.’ (cf. Kalb, 2009). Okamura has been encouraged by the precedents of national referenda in the UK (June 2016) and Italy (December 2016). He prescribes direct democracy as “a panacea for all political ills” (SeanHanley.org.uk, 2015), and operates on the classical populist belief in the inherent virtue of the people (see section 2.1). According to his book, Okamura defines ‘direct democracy’ as greater local, municipal

Figure 3: An SPD poster: “We will stop illegal immigration and dictates from the EU!”



referenda, patterned on the Swiss model. He laments lack of political participation, which he attributes to the sentiment that politics are run by oligarchs. Hitherto, however, Okamura has offered little specification of how exactly these referenda would be carried out in the Czech Republic; at present the issue seems like more of a slogan and talking point.⁷ The SPD manifesto, posted on the website in 2015, states the following:

“Our Movement of Freedom and Direct Democracy advocates, as the only parliamentary party, the change of our political system towards direct democracy, the direct and enforceable responsibility of politicians. We promote the direct choice and appeal of politicians and judges, as well as their personal, material and criminal liability. We are also pushing for a broad law on referenda, so that citizens can decide on their future in crucial matters.” (SPD.cz, 2016).

Okamura speaks in terms of ‘us’ and ‘we,’ never ‘I’—he thus implies that his point of view reflects the “silent majority.” Both his anti-immigrant and anti-elite messages are popular. In six different polls for April–May 2017 SPD has held the 6th or 7th place, with 4.2–7.1% of the vote.

⁷ Like the Communist Party, SPD does not have a realistic chance of being in government, which is perhaps why it does not need precise and accountable plans on its agenda.

Figure 4: May 2017 polling by focus-agency.cz, placing Okamura at 4.4%.

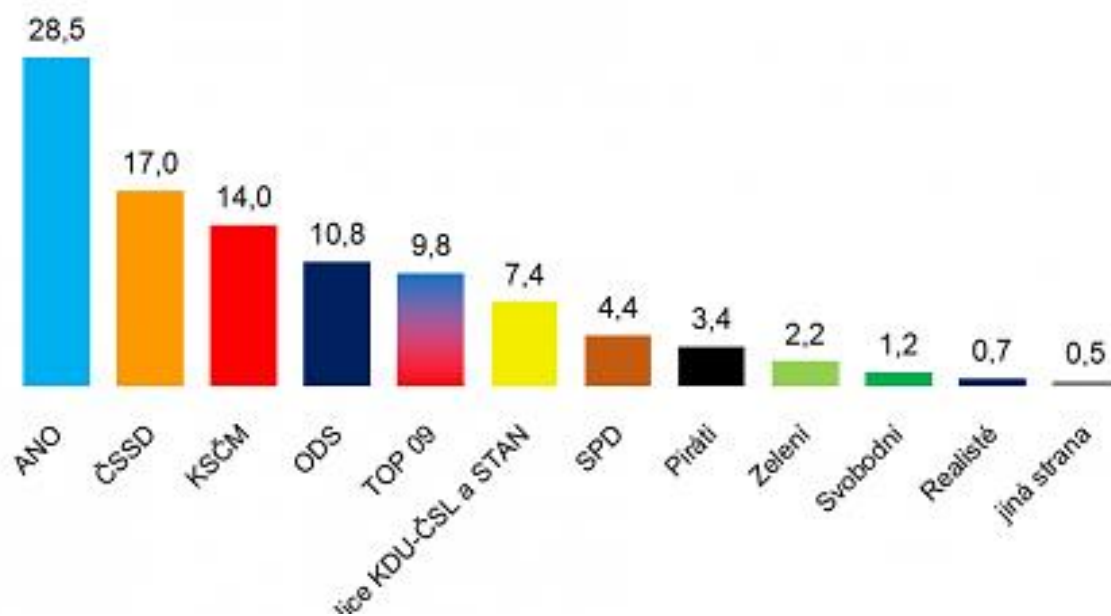
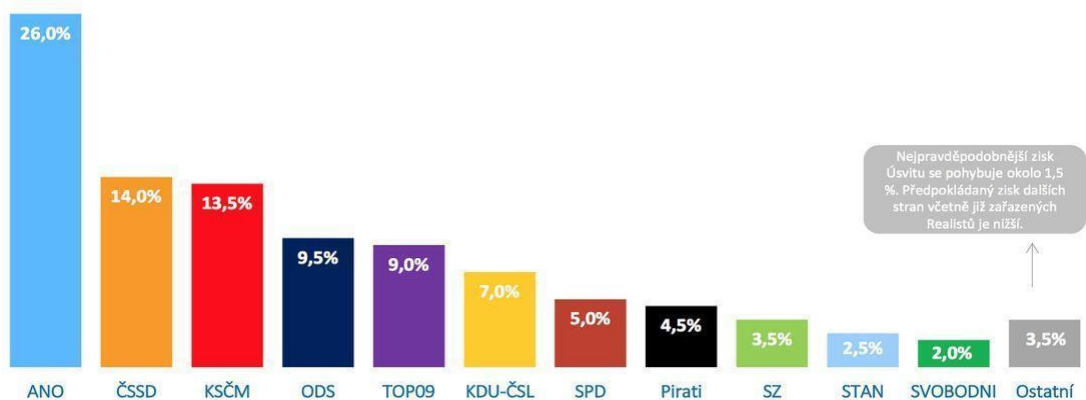


Figure 5: May 2017 Polling by Median, placing Okamura at 5.0%.

Sněmovní volební model, květen 2017



Nevertheless, I hypothesise that Okamura will eventually be side-lined, as Sládek was after 1998. Hanley notes that a constructional flaw in the Republican party: it was “essentially a loose network of local groups linked to a national leadership dominated by Sládek ... Sládek’s personal dominance of the party had already led to repeated factional conflicts and several waves of defections” (2012, 72). All of Okamura’s political projects have hitherto been centred on his personality, which could impede their ability to promote meaningful change.

Table 2: Comparison of the two most successful far-right politicians.

Name	Years in Government	Minority Group Targeted	Largest Electoral Success
Miroslav Sládek	1992–1998 (6 years)	Germans and Roma	8 % (1996)
Tomio Okamura	2013–present (4 years so far)	Muslims	7% (2013)

The next two chapters discuss the two main ideologies promoted by Okamura: populism and anti-foreigner sentiments, including anti-migration. These can be quantified and qualified through analyses of his social media posts.

Chapter II. Populism and Okamura

2.1 – Definition of the phenomenon

Cisár and Štětka (2017) note that, although far-right parties remain marginal in the West, populist politics have become mainstream; Mudde (2016) identifies that populists are rising in popularity across the world. The purpose of this section is to set out the definition of ‘populist’ parties, so we can identify whether Okamura fits the criteria. The conceptual ‘core’ of populism is “people-centrism, anti-elitism/anti-establishment appeal and calls for the restoration of popular sovereignty (Rooduijn 2014), with particular emphasis put on the moralist essence of the divide between the pure people and the bad corrupt elite (Hawkins 2009)” (Havlík and Mejstřík 2016, 92). Hanley notes that, in some circumstances, populists can “play the role of a democratic corrective by acting as a channel for previously unexpressed interests and issues” (2012, 80). Sikk (2011) notes that merely being a new party can help populists come to power.

In CEE, electoral volatility “has been particularly high. The parties that emerged after the fall of communism failed to establish strong organisations and forge strong ties with voters. Such volatility has, as Grigore Pop-Eleches convincingly argued, led voters to turn to unconventional new parties of all kinds” (Hanley and Sikk 2013, 2).

Havlík and Hloušek write that populists see the people and the elites as homogeneous entities, stress the antagonistic nature of relations between the two, and view the people as a “morally pure sovereign” (cf. Mudde, 2004; Laycock, 2005; Stanley, 2011; Hawkins et al., 2012)” (2014, 554). ‘The people’ are conceived as “a monolithic or homogeneous group with collective interests [who] are often differentiated from the governing elites in the broad

sense of the term, with ‘special interests’ sabotaging the interests and democratic rights of the ‘people’ (Laycock, 2005)” (Havlík and Hloušek 2014, 554). Populists believe that the people are inherently good, and their leaders are corrupt and take advantage of them; their discourse is about creating enemies (Laclau, 2005).

There are many different understandings and usages of the term ‘populism,’ and some of the more broad and vague definitions “equate populism with campaigning, demagoguery, or ‘the mob’ (Canovan 2004; Laclau 2005a; Mudde 2004)” (Mudde and Kaltwasser 2012, 3). Thus, Cisář and Štětka write that “populism is currently substituting communism in its role of a universal spectre,” and anybody who is disliked by a certain political player is “labelled a populist” (2017, 286). I do not support these authors’ opinion that “any political campaign is populist by definition, for the word itself denotes the meaning of somebody mobilising public support. In this understanding, populism is part of every politics” (Cisář and Štětka 2017, 286).⁸ In this work, my definition of ‘populism’ is on the side of demagoguery and ‘the mob.’ Populists often work within the party structure system instead of trying to destroy it (as extreme-right politicians would).

Populists are not necessarily far-right; Mudde and Kaltwasser (2012) note that populism can attach itself to any number of ‘host ideologies.’ Havlík and Hlousek write of the new phenomenon in Europe of ‘centrist populism’ a form of political populism “that emphasizes the anti-establishment element of its appeal. The centrism of these parties ... follows from their self-definition as alternatives to the new centrist populist political parties” (2014, 554). Hanley and Sikk note that “some simply view all forms of anti-establishment

⁸ In a tweet from 26 September 2016, Okamura categorises himself as a populist fighting elites—he embraces this label.

politics through the distorting lens of the ‘rise of the far-right’” (although in CEE the extreme right is largely stagnant or in decline, with the important exception of the Jobbik movement in Hungary”) (2013, 1). Mudde writes that there is “no reason to assume that a certain economic doctrine is a defining attribute of populism” (2000, 5). Populists typically appeal to rural, disenfranchised voters in the lower-to-middle class; “xenophobia, nationalism, racism, anti-democracy, and support for a strong state” are default positions for many populists (Mudde 2000, 11). These parties are not extreme-right, and are careful to not be associated with outright fascism or with violent methods. The most prominent Czech populist, Andrej Babiš, lies in the centre of the political spectrum (which is anomalous for a European country); though not all populists are far-right, most on the far right are populist.

Hainsworth writes that populists “benefit from popular disillusionment with mainstream parties” (2000, 9). Hanley notes that “as parties have retreated from civil society and become entwined with the state, they have left increasingly volatile electoral markets, feeding the rise of often short-lived new parties” (2013). These new parties are often personality-dominated. Authors such as Bustikova and Kitschelt propose that, “contrary to an often-held view of radical right in Eastern Europe based on political culture and identity politics, a political-economic perspective is an apt tool for addressing the sources of radical right voters’ grievances” (2009, 460). Havlík and Hloušek note that populists arise amidst “worsening economic or social situation, and the related frustrations of part of the population” (2014, 554). If the country’s perceived prosperity is in decline, populists can arise—Hanley and Sikk attribute populist party breakthroughs to “economic hardship and rising unemployment” (2013, 2).

However, populists can also arise under favourable economic conditions if there are high levels of perceived corruption. Hanley and Sikk write that “anti-establishment breakthroughs arose in a context of growth but increasing corruption ... corruption can interact with a benign socio-economic climate to create a favourable context for anti-establishment reformers – perhaps by shifting voters’ attention from economic concerns to issues of governance” (2013, 3). Thus, although the Czech economy has performed well since the economic crisis (it enjoys an average growth rate of 2–4%), Babiš was able to make a breakthrough.⁹

2.2 – Populism in Czech Politics

As discussed in section 1.2, for the first two decades post-communism Czech democracy alternating between two parties, similar to the British model, which was the vision of Václav Klaus (president 2003–2013) (Haney 2004, 164). A large reason they had been so successful is because of a relatively weak civil society; arguably, populists such as Babiš are the result of a strong civil society (which was the vision of Václav Havel [president 1993–2013]).

Guasti (2016) defines civil society as “a term that delineates the area between the private sphere of interest and the state. ... Active citizenship is realised through active civic and political engagement” (2016, 220). Part of the communist legacy is a weak desire to be active in politics--Hanley writes that fading civic engagement causes “a reversal of earlier

⁹ Anti-establishment reform parties like VV or ANO do not appear to be ‘crisis parties’. They have broken through “more often in periods of economic prosperity than they have during economic downturns” (Hanley and Sikk 2013, 3).

democratic gains and the emergence of problems which severely interfere with democratic processes in ways going beyond earlier concerns about low levels of civic disengagement or anaemic civil societies (Rupnik and Zielonka 2013; Mueller 2014)” (2014, 164).¹⁰ Low participation leads to unusual electoral formations—for instance, during their many years in power, ODS and ČSSD never had enough party members to fill all the regional posts, so they sometimes entered into odd coalition with smaller parties (such as KSČM governors leading an ODS-controlled region).

One reason for low civic engagement is because of high perceptions of corruption in all politicians. According to February 2017 polling by CVVM on the issues that Czech people most care about, corruption is the top issue (listed by 64% of the population as their number one concern). When citizens lose trust in their political leaders, it leads to greater voter disengagement. “the rise of corruption as a salient issue leads established parties to hemorrhage voters and members, opening up space for ill-defined, new anti-establishment parties with vague platforms of anti-corruption and reform (VV in 2010, ANO in 2013) (Haughton and Deegan-Krause 2014)” (Hanley 2014, 167). Two crucial elements “cause the drop of satisfaction with politics: first, the increasingly frequent association of established political parties and their representatives with corruption and in various forms, both in the eyes of the public and in media discourse. Second, the negative perception of political institutions (and politics generally) was further amplified by the chronic weakness and instability of successive governments; this weakness was accompanied by extensive (and often well-founded) allegations of corruption (Havlík, 2011)” (Havlík and Hloušek 2014, 555).

¹⁰ Sztompka (1996) patronizingly dismissed the inability to develop meaningful civil society as evidence of the “civilizational incompetence” of the post-communist citizen (Aleksandr Zinoviev’s *Homo sovieticus*).

Part of populist ideology is the facile rejection of all other parties as corrupt—Hanley warns that this has detrimental effects on democratic development: “high and growing levels of public distrust in the effectiveness and honesty of the political system have had a corrosive effect on established representative institutions and, in particular, on the party system” (2014, 166). Hanley writes that the model to fear for the Czech Republic “is not a Hungarian-style concentration of power in the hands of a dominant ruling party or charismatic populist leader, but a Bulgaria-style breakdown of trust and a rejection of any and all parties (Ganev 2014)”; he warns that Bulgaria is example of cycles of protest voting that in the end, “give way to waves of anti-political civic mobilization” that weaken civil society (2014, 168). The dominant cleavage that “polarized Czech politics in the May 2010 election was the split between civil society and the official political leadership, represented by clientelistically adapted parties” (Hanley 2014, 167). The inability of established Czech parties to respond to economic crisis, “coupled with de-legitimation by growing concerns over corruption, prepared the way for an anti-establishment reform party” (Hanley and Sikk 2013, 2).

Mobilisation against corruption was met with particular success. Populists won because of “the population’s growing dissatisfaction with post-1989 party politics, particularly with the corruption scandals associated with the traditional parties” (Cisář and Štětka 2017, 286). The seemingly solid ODS-ČSSD pre-eminence came tumbling down because they “have represented rigidity and ossification, rather than democratic consolidation” (Hanley and Sikk 2013, 4), and as they fell, new parties moved in and occupied their voter base. Some of these new parties are “part of a backlash against austerity and economic hard times, after the global downturn and the Eurozone crisis” (Hanley and Sikk 2013, 2).

Hanley and Sikk note that after the Eurozone crisis, across CEE, “populist protest parties, led by a colourful array of ‘non-politicians’ ranging from aristocrats to central bankers, journalists and businessmen began to break broken into parliaments in the region” (2013, 1). In the Czech Republic, the first such protest-based populist party was called ‘Public Affairs’ (VV), led by businessman Radek John. In the 2010 parliamentary election, this party gained 11% of the vote and became a partner in the coalition government, thus becoming the first electorally successful exclusively populist political party in the country’s history (Mareš 2011, 292).¹¹ VV’s electoral breakthrough “tells a story of changed dynamics of party politics in the Czech Republic, once seen as the one of the most stable in the region. ... the drop of support of the old political parties and the rise of new political entrepreneurs building their electoral success on declining general trust in politics and repeated political crises” (Havlík and Hloušek 2014, 553). Although the party dates back to 2002, “for a long time it was only active in Prague local politics. John’s message was focussed against entrenched elites or, as he called them, “political dinosaurs” (Groszkowski, 2011).

VV was the first party to emphasise direct democracy, although it did not promote other points on SPD’s agenda. Unlike Okamura, John “agreed with the country’s membership in the EU [and] refused extremism and racism, yet its stern ‘law and order’ approach and an ethos of protest apparently captivated part of the electorate which otherwise could vote for the extreme right and VV thus weakening this part of the political spectrum” (2011, 292). It practiced a form of direct democracy within the party—any registered party members could vote on party issues. Theirs was a winning approach, and VV demonstrated

¹¹ As mentioned in the previous section, populist parties are not just a response to financial troubles; VV was elected when the economy was ticking upwards.

that populists can overcome one of the greatest short-term challenges to Czech democracy: voter apathy and disenfranchisement. Okamura learned this lesson for his own political career. Ironically, in April 2012, VV's Minister of Transport, Vít Bárta, was convicted on bribery charges and the party was annulled. Its short-lived success "was followed by the rise of another populist political movements using similar rhetoric as VV did in 2010" (Havlík and Hloušek 2014, 553). John opened the door to further populists, most notably Andrej Babiš, who formed his party ANO 2011 the next year.

As mentioned previously, the most successful outsider to challenge the Czech political elite is Andrej Babiš, the second-richest man in the country with sizeable holdings in the agricultural business. He served as minister of finance from 2014 to 2017. The *New York Times* (2017) reported that he is the "best-known businessman-turned-politician in Central Europe"; Babiš amassed his wealth by "transforming an agribusiness conglomerate into a diversified corporate behemoth that includes major media properties," including the two large newspapers *Mladá Fronta* and *Lidové Noviny* (which have respective readerships of 654,000 and 210,000 per week).

In 2011, Babiš formed his own party, ANO, which stands for 'Action of Dissatisfied Citizens' (*ano* also means 'yes' in Czech). The party's slogans are "we are not politicians", and "YES, things will get better"; it is a simple message of protest and optimism. In the wake of the VV and ODS scandals, Babiš's strategy has been to consistently define corruption as the main problem; he promised to bring business sense to government. ANO performed so well in the 2013 parliamentary elections that they formed the second-largest member of the coalition, and Babiš was named finance minister.

The New York Times reported in 2017 that Babiš has rejected comparisons with fellow businessman Donald Trump, “but has also added that he and the new American president share an aversion to immigration and a tendency to say politically incorrect things.” Some have compared Babiš to Silvio Berlusconi or Donald Trump (Hanley, 2016), as these populists also won over centre voters (SeanHanley.org.uk, 2015). Babiš is not afraid to show off that he is a ‘normal person,’; one such barefaced attempt came in June 2015, when he posted a photo on his Twitter and Facebook that showed him urinating in public, a barefaced attempt to show he is a “normal person.” This populist persona is a threat to Okamura’s would-be voter base.

Figure 6: Babiš urinating in public at a concert.



Okamura is convinced that ANO, the onetime protest party, has become mainstream. He criticises Babiš for flip-flopping on positions. For instance, Babiš initially supported the redistribution of refugees, but changing his tune when public opinion turned against it—thus, beginning on 2 September 2016, Okamura tweeted complaints of the millions of Czech crowns Babiš allocated for spending on migrants.

The Czech economy is performing well: as of mid-2017 the country is running a budget surplus. Babiš allegedly tried to rein in tax abuse by medium-sized business (although he tellingly did not focus on tax abuse by large firms, such as his agricultural conglomerate, Agrofert). His largest legislative achievement was mandating electronic cash registers to combat VAT fraud—this agitated small-business owners such as bar and restaurant owners, so as *The Economist* (2017) reports, to blunt the political impact as the law went into effect, “he appeared at a local tavern, cameras in tow, calming nerves by ordering a round of shots for the house.” Babiš was a skilful populist, but one fatal misstep brought him down.

His distaste for a governing elite led him to conflicts with his coalition partner, Prime Minister Sobotka—“Babiš is quick to call the prime minister a ‘career politician’ who has ‘never had a real job.’ Babiš was careful not to express ambitions of becoming prime minister—that would not jibe with his apolitical image” (Cunningham, 2015). Nevertheless, until a recent scandal, he seemed a favourite for the post of Prime Minister in 2018. As mentioned earlier, he owns two newspapers, and in May 2017 secret recordings were brought forward, revealing that he was trying to suppress the publication of negative stories about himself. Out of fear of Babiš threatened the independence of Czech media, Sobotka and Zeman pressured Babiš to resign from his post. Surprisingly, even after his resignation, ANO leads in the polls, but Babiš will probably stay out of the spotlight and allow another ANO MP to take the lead in October.

2.3 – Okamura’s Brand

In line with his belief in direct democracy, Okamura stays directly involved with his followers via social media. Štětka and Vochocová (2014) wrote that in the 2013 election, Facebook was an electoral game-changer; Cisář and Štětka write that Czech populists are successful, in part, because they have “established themselves as significant players on social media platforms” (2017, 291). Although other politicians have more Facebook and Twitter followers, Okamura’s popularity on YouTube and Instagram exceeds his electoral representation.

Table 3: Number of followers for each party’s official pages (as of April 2017).

Party	Facebook	Twitter	YouTube	Instagram
Babiš (ANO 2011)	102,000	308,000	4,000	60
Social Democrats (ČSSD)	21,500	30,400	400	-
Communists (KSČM)	7,600	-	300	-
Civic Democrats (ODS)	40,000	11,800	1,200	-
Christian Democrats (KDU–ČSL)	16,700	17,300	180	-
Okamura (SPD)	29,300	3,000	6,000	2,300
TOP 09	107,000	15,000	1,900	-

Okamura joined Instagram in 2016 and has become the most prolific user of the site among Czech politicians. On his account, he shows himself engaged in traditional Czech activities. He chooses to post photos focussing on his favourite themes of individual work and empowerment, as well as (sometimes ridiculous) photos that generate a cult of personality.

Figure 7: Okamura with a handicapped person, April 2017.



*Figure 8: Okamura working out, April 2017.*¹²



¹² This photo has more 'likes' than any other on his Instagram.

Okamura directly communicates with followers several times a week via videos in which he promotes his ideology. Beginning in mid-2016, he began to upload regular YouTube videos (advertised on his Facebook and Twitter feeds); to date, he has uploaded over 970. These are sorted into four playlists: “on the Stolen Revolution” (anti-Czech elite), “on the Czech Economy” (pro-SPD agenda), “on dictates from the European Superstate” (anti-EU), and “on the invasion of illegal immigrants and multicultural madness” (anti-immigration). Some videos also portray an ‘SPD newsroom,’ wherein party members discuss current events, and occasionally perform investigative journalism. For instance, after the December 2016 terrorist attack on a Christmas market in Berlin, SPD members went to the scene and filmed videos which they posted on their Facebook page showing the threat of immigrants. Hanley notes that the days of Sládek, “when a hard-working populist

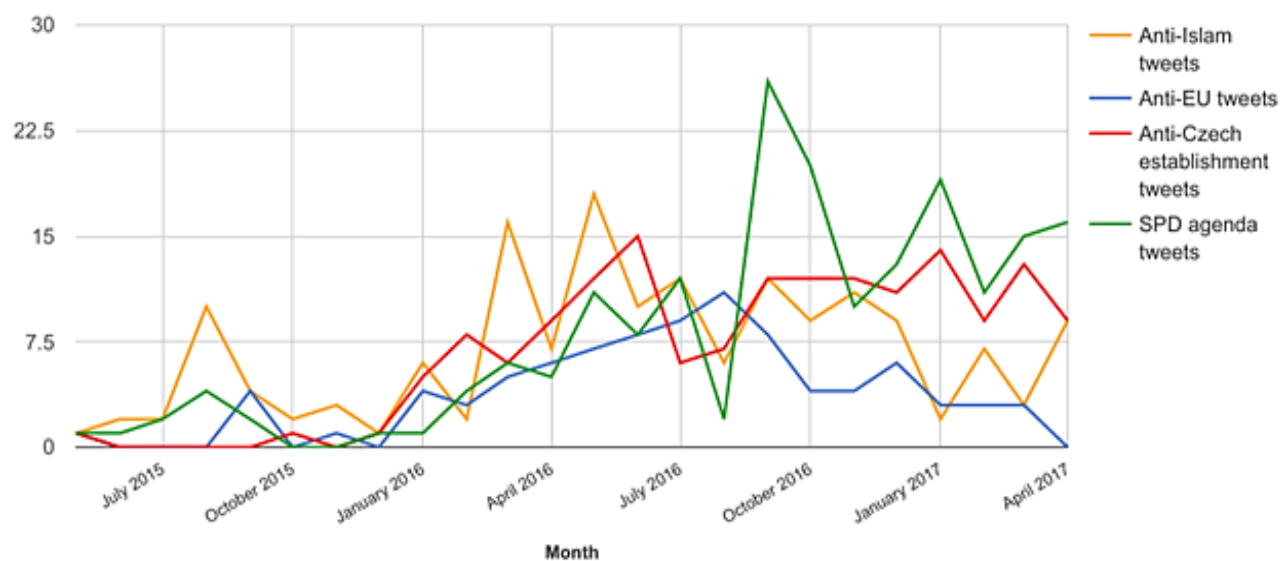
**Figure 9: One of Okamura’s YouTube videos, 30 May 2017 –
“We do not want the euro in the Czech Republic.”**



demagogue actually had to go on the stump, endlessly touring small town the Czech Republic to build up a grassroots following are long gone” (SeanHanley.org.uk, 2015). In this era, it is easy for far-right politicians to reach a large audience.

I have analysed Okamura’s tweets from September 2013 to May 2017 (about 650 in total) to trace developments in his political platform. He joined Twitter on 19 September 2013 and tweets several times a week; so far his most prolific month for tweeting was September 2016, in which he produced 59 tweets, or almost 2 per day. Okamura’s tweets sometimes provide a window to his unfiltered personality—for instance, his fourth tweet (26 September 2013) read: “we have a real chance to clean up this trash heap of a country.” His pre-2016 tweets were more about simple party platforms, but in 2016 he became more reactionary to current events. He especially spoke out more against Islam.

Figure 10: Themes of Okamura’s tweets per month.



Hainsworth writes that populists do not represent merely a vote against established politicians, but they stand for an original agenda (2000, 12). On many occasions, Okamura does not merely criticise others, but advertises his policies and calls for decisive action. He offers new solutions to topics that are less controversial, thus showing a degree of political aptitude—for example, he has called for improved living conditions for seniors and extra support for families with children; he also calls on the government to reject any tax increases, to stop privatising Czech hospitals, and stop exhausting the state gold reserves. In total, a majority (32.7%) of his tweets endorse his own SPD positions. Although Okamura may make inflammatory remarks, they are uncommon. Interestingly, the four broad categories of his tweets correspond to the four themed playlists on his YouTube channel.

One curious feature of Okamura's social media activity is that he never mentions far-right figures in nearby CEE countries, but instead those further abroad. This is surprising because the Czech Republic, Poland, and Hungary are regional allies and presumably their anti-EU movement would be stronger if he worked alongside Jobbik or other similar leaders. Instead, he has appeared at events with Geert Wilders and Marine Le Pen, and tweeted support for Donald Trump and Nigel Farage. Okamura sees his place within a movement sweeping through Western democracies. He proclaimed at the third general SPD conference: “we are not just a bumper of European parties, but the true European vision!” (Okamura, 2016).¹³

¹³ Although on Twitter Okamura presents himself and Marine le Pen as fighting the same fight, their national situations are quite different—many of Le Pen's agenda items, such as curbing immigration and leaving the euro, are already practiced in the country.

Figure 11: Okamura with Western European far-right leaders, posted on his Instagram January 2017.



Czech populists from Babiš to Okamura parties enjoy support on one issue: taking back control from ‘corrupt Prague elites’ (called the *pražská kavárna*, or café intelligentsia, by all camps). The problem is, in Czech politics, it can be hard to define who this is. It certainly is not president Zeman—Cisář and Štětka write that Zeman has established himself by “using a rhetoric of strong anti-elitism (particularly aimed at journalists and intellectuals) and an ever more frequent language of exclusionary populism (aimed at various minorities and, most importantly, at immigrants and Muslims)” (2017, 290). One Czech newspaper reported in April 2016 that Zeman “likes to think of himself as the voice of the Czech province. He won the presidential election against the conservative liberal Prince Karel VII Schwarzenberg. Zeman openly states that the influx

of refugees is a planned invasion, organized by the Islamic Brotherhood” (Prague Monitor, 2016). When Zeman gets asked awkward questions, he often responds, “‘you must be from Prague, only someone from the capital could ask such a question.’ [The province] is more conservative, averse to foreigners, the same as in all of post-communist Central Europe” (Prague Monitor, 2016). In 2013, two Czech girls were kidnapped in Pakistan (which also alienated many Czechs from Islam). President Zeman personally contacted the president of Pakistan, and the girls were eventually rescued; this incident reinforced his image as a ‘man of the people.’ Okamura has never publicly attacked President Zeman (with whom he shares similar ideology); on many occasions, he has even defended the President from criticism by Czech press.

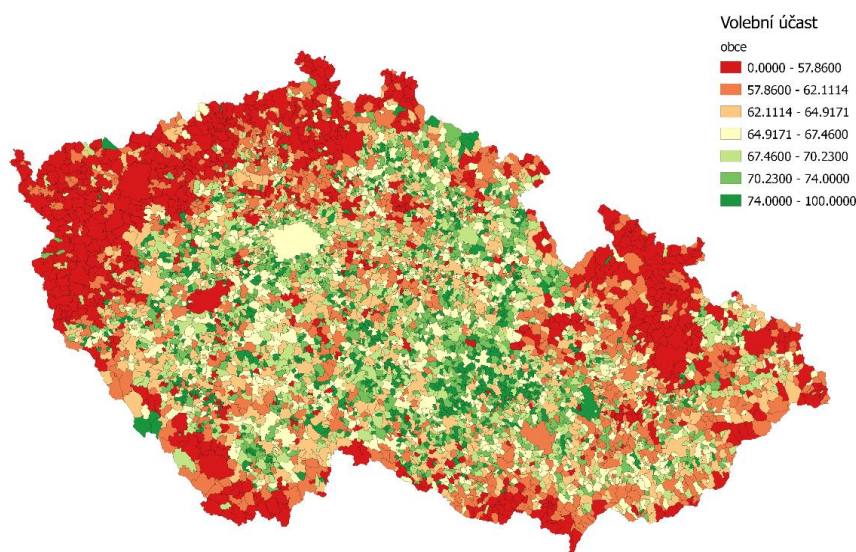
Opinions vary as to the level of threat Zeman poses to Czech democracy—Dawson and Hanley lament that after assuming office in March 2013, “Zeman wasted no time before trying to turn the country’s parliamentary democracy into a semi-presidential system, appointing a technocratic government over the heads of the country’s political parties (Traynor 2013)” (2016, 21). Overall, however, the prognosis is not so bad—Hanley (2014) writes that “Czech democracy has not so far suffered from dangerous concentrations of power and does not have strong players with illiberal political visions. There is no Czech Viktor Orbán. At the national level there is no party as politically dominant as Smer currently is in Slovakia or Fidesz in Hungary – and, tellingly, there never has been” (2014, 164).¹⁴ Some fear that Zeman can erode the country’s democratic

¹⁴ Czech political scientists are more concerned about “the failure of the country’s electoral politics and electoral system to generate clear and sustainable parliamentary majorities (Havlík and Kopeček 2008; Balík 2013) than the risks of power concentration” (Hanley 2014, 164).

institutions, but Hanley is confident that “the relatively dispersed spread of power and relative robustness of formal institutions, especially political parties, thwart whatever ambition Zeman may have harboured to become a ‘Czech Putin’ ” (2014, 165). Zeman is running for re-election in 2018, and perhaps more dictatorial tendencies may manifest themselves as he ages.

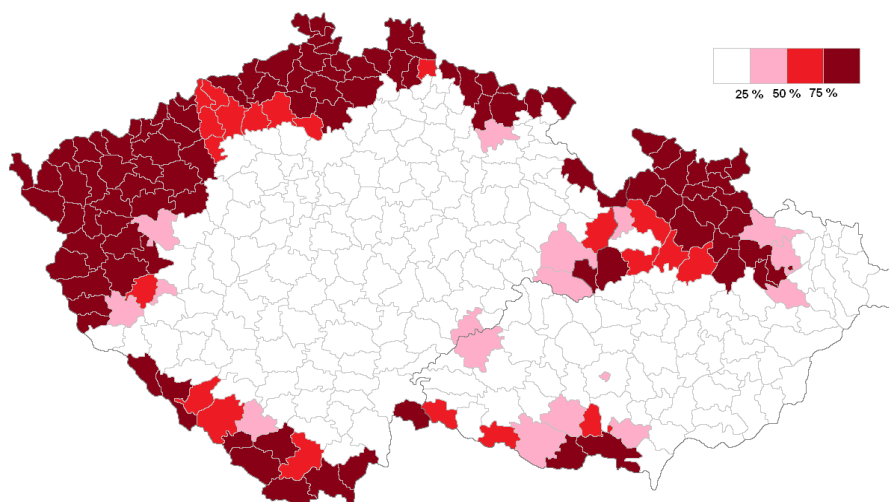
Zeman’s support is drawn from rural areas and smaller cities (cf. Buzalka 2008); he carried the 2013 election without gaining the majority of votes in five multicultural urban centres (Prague, Brno, Plzeň, České Budějovice, and Liberec). Zeman has built up a cult of personality (not unlike that of Babiš and Okamura) amongst the rural populace, especially in Moravia and Silesia, which are more conservative and religious than western Bohemia. Especially important to his victory are the country’s former Sudeten German regions, which have lower voter participation and are the strongest supporters of far-right parties (KohoVolit.eu, 2014).

Figure 12: Voter participation in the 2013 presidential election.



The degree of voter participation in elections is a direct correlation to the regions that were populated by mostly Germans:

Figure 13: Percentage of Germans living in Czech lands prior to 1945.



After World War II, poorer Czechs were given land in these regions as the Germans were forcibly removed. For the last 70 years, the regions have remained relatively poor, and “poverty and social problems in these areas lead to political apathy” (Komínek, 2013). From these regions Sládek drew his support in the 1990s, as the occupants feared that a revanchist Germany would want the territory back.

The ill fortunes of VV and Babiš, and the weak power of Zeman, show that populism, although a central feature of Czech politics, has its limits. VV was the phenomenon of a businessman-turned-politician trying to save the nation, who collapsed after being found guilty of corruption charges; almost exactly the same situation as is happening with Babiš. Given this pattern, it would be unsurprising if Okamura were also be engulfed in a corruption

scandal if he came to serious power (there is already the troubling precedent of the 30,000 fraudulent signatures on his 2013 petition to run for president).

Chapter III. Anti-Foreigner Sentiments

3.1 – Xenophobia as a Far-Right Ideology

As mentioned above, populism can be easily conflated with far-right politics because populists may say whatever will they think people want to hear, which often devolves to racism (cf. Ghodsee, 2008). Kalb (2009) discuss opposition to globalisation as a tenet of far-right parties' platforms; they wish to protect the historical, ethnic nation by staking out cultural ground, opposing immigration. More centrist or leftist parties discuss how to assimilate minorities that are already present, but far-right parties speak in simpler terms: 'keep them out.' The far-right should not be seen as a 'uniform type' bearing "essentially homogeneous traits" (Hainsworth, 2016), but Pirro writes that far-right parties operate on an ideology based on a "combination of nativism, authoritarianism, and populism (cf. Mudde 2007)" (2014, 247). When a large social event shifts the political atmosphere changes, centrist parties may move further to the right, as ČSSD and ANO did after the beginning of the migration crisis in 2015. Bustikova and Kitschelt write that "moderate right wing parties have incorporated exclusionary appeals into their programmatic agenda, thus further reducing the options for the successful entry and endurance of the radical right" (2009, 460).

Holy argues that the roots of current ethno-national conflict in the former socialist societies of CEE "are not to be sought primarily in 'age-old enmities' and that it would be a mistake to imagine that ethnic and national conflicts had been simply suspended and held in 'cold storage' under socialism" (1996, 279). Rather, the politicization of ethnic attitudes "occurs during critical events when the 'other' becomes a scapegoat for economic misery" (Bustikova and Kitschelt 2009, 460). Pirro notes that "the question of ethnic minorities, as

it is configured today in CEE, has been revamped in a new fashion and politicised only after 1989” (2014, 248). Attacking the Roma for causing all of society’s ills is a relatively new phenomenon; in the 1990s, Holy tracked the rise of nationalist sentiment and xenophobia across all former socialist countries of CEE and reached the following conclusion: “nationalism provides a convenient answer to the question of who is to blame for the economic and political backwardness of the former socialist countries in comparison with their Western counterparts. The idiom of national difference has become a convenient means of assigning blame to others” (1996, 279). Xenophobic discourse has been one of the few factors to unite the four countries that make up the ‘Visegrád group.’

A counter-approach to understanding Czech xenophobia is to look to the nineteenth-century roots of nationalism, when Bohemia and Moravia had large German-speaking populations, which they perceived of as an invading ‘other’ (Cohen 1974; Grillo 1980; Heiberg 1980; Schlesinger 1987), but historical threats of conquest from Germans are now replaced by the threat of immigrants, especially Muslims. The Czech Republic has levels of income behind western countries, so Czechs are especially sensitive to the prospect of paying for thousands of refugees or migrants.

The Visegrád group, or V4, is a relatively informal alliance comprised of the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary and Poland. The group began as a summit meeting of leaders from Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Poland held in the Hungarian town of Visegrád in February 1991 and has served as a forum for limited diplomatic planning. Hitherto, V4 cooperation has been relatively minimal because they all have different agendas. The alliance lost importance after all four states joined the EU in May 2004, but with the late 2015 migration crisis, it found a renewed (albeit brief) *raison d’être*. *The Economist* (2016)

notes that “anti-migrant sentiment has unified the group, normally a disparate bunch who agree on some subjects (like opposing Europe’s climate policies) but are divided on others (like Russia)”. In these countries, it is not opposition parties, but the ruling parties who have agendas typically considered illiberal. Part of their message is the rejection of ‘dictates’ from Brussels. Although V4 countries have not chosen to opt out of EU policies (as the UK did with euro adoption or the Schengen passport free zone), their governments share a common view that “the EU should keep out of member states’ internal affairs, only facilitating common solutions when needed” (VisegradGroup.eu, 2016). After the migrant crisis in 2015, they succeeded in blocking a migrant distribution scheme.

Hungary’s Jobbik has been the most successful far-right party in the region, which has particularly entrenched historical grievances. Jobbik leaders plead for cross-border ethnic self-determination for the Hungarians left outside the borders of the state, drawn up by the western Victors after World War I. (Hanley and Dawson, *Fading Mirage*, 2016, 20). Unlike its equivalents in the Visegrád 4 countries, the Hungarian far-right has made substantial electoral gains and is a major player in the National Assembly. However, this is because this country has certain domestic criteria that are not easily replicable in the Czech Republic, notably a tradition of “anti-democratic nationalism and extremism” (Mareš and Havlík 2016, 324).¹⁵ Like the Czech Republic, Poland has no large far-right party, but the Poles’ broader politics are more conservative than the Czechs’.

¹⁵ Slovakia has a similar movement, ‘People’s Party – Our Slovakia,’ which holds 14 seats on the National Council. Ironically, one of its priorities is fighting Hungarian irredentists in southern Slovakia.

3.2 – Okamura and Muslims

The fact that the figurehead of the Czech far right is Asian in name and appearance shows that ethnic purity is not the voters' key concern. Although Okamura is anti-Islamic, he is not necessarily pro-Slavic; he advocates civic, not ethnic nationalism. He fights against the assumed 'laziness' of the Roma, and security concerns from Muslims.

Similarly to Sládek, Okamura has also verbally attacked the Roma population—from 2012–2015 he built his reputation as a skilled and provocative public speaker, capturing the electorate's attention through the rhetoric of social populism, including frequent racist commentaries against the alleged 'criminality of the Gypsy population' (as tweeted on 20 June 2015). In a 2013 text on the tabloid news server *Parlamentní Listy*, Okamura wrote, "the gypsies should wake up their elites, unite, and try to form their own state ... the Czech Republic should democratically support their emigration to the country from which their ancestors first came, i.e., ideally back to one of the states in India" (Romea.cz, 2012). The tabloid press "often inclines toward anti-elitism and the exclusion of out-groups (especially Muslims, and occasionally the Roma)" (Cisár and Štětko 2017, 291; cf. Beneš and Braun 2010, 70). However, Okamura no longer tweets about Roma, because Muslim immigrants to the country are the new threat. Some fear that, like the Roma, migrants will misuse the social system; it would be overwhelmed by "free-loaders". Minorities' and immigrants' value is determined by the degree to which they work.

As mentioned in section 1.3, prior to 2015, anti-immigrant rhetoric was not part of Okamura's political platform. Analysis of his tweets see a huge spike in anti-migrant rhetoric in August 2015—this suggests that his actions (and perhaps actions of any successful far-

right politician) are more opportunistic than ideological, and the deeply ideological far right have negligible electoral success. Since shifting his focus to migration, Okamura has gained notoriety as the figure in the country who gives extreme statements on Islam (which are especially popular in the tabloids *Blesk* and *Aha!*). For instance, in May 2016, Okamura said that “it is clear that Islamic values and western democracy are fundamentally incompatible” (Usmani, 2016). The *Washington Post* reported in January 2015 that he suggested that Czechs “breed dogs and piglets as pets and walk them near their neighbourhoods and mosques”; he also complained that “each kebab we buy is funding for another burqa.” He has called Angela Merkel a lunatic and demanded the cancellation of the 88 Syrian refugees who were slated to be resettled in the Czech Republic (Na palate, 2015). On a day that Muslim leaders met for a conference in Prague, he tweeted, “poor king Charles IV [who] fought his whole life against Islam—he must look on in wonder” (Twitter, 23 May 2017).

**Figure 14: One of Okamura’s YouTube videos, 30 May 2017 -
“Sexual harassment by migrants.”**



So far, he has mobilised a moderate number of people to his cause—October 2015 demonstrations against immigration attracted over 5,000 participants.

According to the aforementioned February 2017 CVVM poll, immigration is the second-most important issue for Czechs, with 61% of the population concerned about it (although the country has only 20,000 Muslims, less than 0.2% of the population [CIA.gov, 2016 est]). Part of the populace's fear of foreigners is the legacy of the departure of Jews and Germans from Czech lands during World War II. People have become less accustomed to the idea of cosmopolitanism, and the Czech Republic has become a highly homogenous country (even the Vietnamese minority that came in the 1970s is subject to casual racism). Few Czechs have personal encounters with Islam or Muslims, so are susceptible to tactics of fear and persuasion.

Okamura holds a philosophy of the mutual incompatibility between Christianity and Islam; he uses a *longue durée* approach to history to castigate Muslims as invaders to the Czech lands. In a January 2017 debate with Mohamed Abbas, leader of the Muslim Union in the Czech Republic, Okamura cited the 1526 Battle of Mohács—during this battle, young Louis II Jagiellon, the heir to the Czech branch of the Jagiellon dynasty, was killed fighting the Turks. The death of this line eventually allowed the Habsburgs to expand their holdings into Bohemia and Moravia, ushering in 300 years of Austrian dominance. Charles University historian Petr Čornej noted that the Hussites, 15th-century Czech warriors, “sharply defined themselves against Islam”—although many parts of Europe still saw them as Protestant heretics, “they deserved recognition for the struggle against the Turks” (Kašpar, 2016). These historical narratives have resonated well with the Czech populace.

Previous anti-Islam movements have risen and fallen without garnering the political momentum that Okamura has. Martin Konvička, biologist and lecturer at the University of South Bohemia, made lots of public noise (saying statements even cruder than Okamura's), but failed to gain political traction. Like Okamura, he has had multiple political organisations (the Czech Defence League [CZDL]; 'We do not want Islam in the Czech Republic' [IVČRN]; 'Bloc against Islamisation' [BPI]; and 'Konvička's Initiative' [IMK]); his most recent, "Alternative for the Czech Republic," gained a mere 0.3% of the votes in the 2016 senate elections and failed to qualify for the next round. In 2017 he has not yet ventured into politics. The main difference between the two is that Konvička did not have electoral success. He was a senate candidate, but did not make it in (even as an independent); he is now gone from the public eye.

Okamura also focusses on the 'direct democracy' issue, and also having a public persona built on more than mere anti-Islam rhetoric. At its third national conference, the SPD declared the following: "We must also tell people that we are not just a shout against migrants, but that as the only political force in this country, we are pushing the change of the current pseudo-democratic system to a truly democratic system" (SPD.cz, 2016). Single-issue parties will not survive, and that is why Okamura has done well where Konvička has not.

Most Czech politicians also oppose more Muslims in the country. In September 2015, Babiš "called on NATO to destroy human smugglers' ships in the Mediterranean [and] ... strengthen security on Turkey's borders" (Fraňková, 2015). President Zeman has publicly said "I also do not want Islam in the Czech Republic"; he also attended an anti-Islam rally in November 2015 and calls Muslim refugees "'practically impossible' to integrate" (*The*

Economist 2016). Zeman has relatively little hard power, but he has the soft power of influencing public opinion; by making anti-immigrant rhetoric the mainstream, he has removed any potential notion of ‘elite political correctness,’ which is criticism levied at politicians further west. The more moderate Bohuslav Sobotka said in August 2016 that “we don’t want a strong Muslim community in our country” (Novinky.cz), but even his position shows the latent conservatism of even the Czech left (or simply the reality that it is politically unpopular to advocate for more refugees). Mainstream parties do not try to bridge the divide between Islam and the Czech populace, bar the centrist TOP 09, the only mainstream party to have offered support to Syrian refugees (Novinky.cz, 2016).¹⁶

Although at the height of the migration crisis in 2015, much was written and said about Islam in the Czech press, it has now become a much smaller issue. There is no large, far-right anti-Islam movement, because mainstream political parties defend the interests of the Czech citizen who does not want immigrants, so they do not go elsewhere. Okamura has gained popularity by speaking on this issue, but not as much as he might have if other domestic politicians were pro-immigration, as they are in Germany or Sweden.

3.4 – Czech Opposition to the EU

Across Europe, most far- and radical-right parties oppose the EU in order to differentiate themselves from the political establishment (cf. Taggart 1998). Euroscepticism may also have additional motives in CEE—the pre-2004 negotiation process for accession

¹⁶ Václav Havel paid careful attention to the country’s minorities, but his approach is not popular practice. Although he was a popular president, Havel was not particularly adept at tapping into popular sentiment; whilst president, every party he endorsed performed poorly in elections, so eventually he stopped endorsing parties altogether.

“entailed stringent criteria for candidate countries; hence, [far-right] parties in post-communist countries play on the fatigue and comparative disadvantages deriving from EU conditionality” (Pirro 2014, 248-249). Pirro continues that far-parties also usually “denounce a [perceived] loss of national sovereignty in favour of the EU—in CEE, both the recently regained independence of these countries and diffuse anti-Western sentiments are likely to shape the anti-EU rhetoric of these parties” (2014, 248). Okamura has specifically warned against the Czech Republic being a ‘protectorate’ of the USA or Germany (tweets on 2 May 2017 and 29 August 2016), and he also opposes the EU ceding sovereignty to Turkey. He first called for the Czech Republic to leave the EU on 22 September 2015, and has since tweeted on the issue 17 times.¹⁷

Regarding Western and EU integration, opinions and approaches differed vastly between Presidents Havel (1990–2003) and Klaus (2003–2013): Havel eagerly led the Czech Republic into NATO, but it fell upon the reticent Klaus to bring the country into the EU, and he did so whilst trying to keep Brussels at arm’s length (Beneš and Braun 2010, 62). Most Czechs want no further European integration (Benes and Braun 2010, 61; cf. Taggart and Szczerbiak, 2004 and Bustikova, 2009)—an October 2015 survey showed that, of the former communist states, distrust of the EU was highest in the Czech Republic (63% of those surveyed) (Tempest, 2015). There is little popular support for discarding the Czech crown and adopting the euro (as neighbouring Slovakia did in 2009), except in some of the smaller opposition parties. Beneš and Braun note that the perceived ‘loss of sovereignty’ in monetary policy “has been the main political obstacle for the adoption of the euro. No progress was

¹⁷ The most recent tweet was 19 September 2016.

achieved despite the technical readiness of the Czech Republic and heavy lobbying by the business community” (2010, 71).¹⁸ Babiš supports EU membership, but opposes the Czech Republic adopting the euro and any further integration (Lazarová, 2017). With such strong opposition, it is unlikely the euro will be adopted soon.

Esparza writes that the EU has come to be perceived of as “an ‘oppressor’ entity which portrays democratic deficit, restricts freedom, and threatens Czech national identity” (2010, 413). Geography is a large factor for the Czechs’ Euroscepticism: their nation has been shaped by defensiveness against outsiders (the country’s borders are defined naturally by the Ore Mountains and have remained unchanged for 1000 years). Outsiders have taken various forms throughout history: the Catholics, the Austrians, the Nazis, the capitalists, the Russians, and now, the EU. In a separate article, Esparza notes the symbolism at play in opposing the EU. He wrote of President Klaus amidst negotiations over the Lisbon Treaty in 2009:

“[Klaus] compared himself to Jan Hus, a medieval priest and reformer who preceded the Protestant Reformation and Martin Luther. He emphasised that the old rector received fierce criticism from Paris in the beginning of the fifteenth century, as happened to him during the Czech EU presidency ... Despite offering the EU his exceptional and distinctive ideas as the very solution to the EU, the ‘Eurofederalists’, who created the Lisbon Treaty in order to create a Superstate, have betrayed him, or better said, have betrayed the original idea of the EU. ... Klaus, who identifies himself with the symbolic meaning of Jan Hus, has internalised and assumed the role of a Czech martyr and EU dissident. In this sense, he has symbolically accepted his future political death but with the belief that in the future, he will be remembered and acknowledged as a fighter against injustice, like Jan Hus” (2010, 57-58).

Strikingly, the main Czech critic of the EU was not a fringe figure like Nigel Farage in the UK, but the country’s own president. Nevertheless, in spite of all of the cold feelings

¹⁸ Although this may change somewhat because of how unpopular the interventions by the Czech National Bank have been.

towards Brussels, the odds of a ‘Czexit’ from the EU are remote; neither Babiš, Sobotka, nor Zeman is entrenched anti-EU, and Okamura’s petitions for leaving the Union were all turned down.

In post-communist states, being anti-EU is often accompanied by being pro-Russian. Okamura is perhaps the most pro-Russian of all active parties. He has defended Russia’s right to interfere in Ukraine (Facebook, 2014), and during the Crimea crisis in March 2014, one deputy from Dawn participated in the (so-called) referendum of secession from Ukraine. Russia currently poses little military threat to the Czech Republic (other than potential cyber security), which makes it an attractive alternative to leadership from the West.

CEE leaders sometimes ‘flirt’ with Russia, especially to make a political point to Brussels (but despite making overtures towards Russia, Zeman never stopped actually listening to the West). In the May 2015 Victory Day Parade (the 70th anniversary of the Soviets’ defeat of Nazi Germany), President Zeman was one of only two EU heads of state in Moscow (Wesolowsky, 2015). The Czech Republic is the only NATO ally whose president denies that Russia has a military presence in Ukraine; this same president also supports the lifting of sanctions on Russia. Jakub Janda writes that “according to a recent analysis of Russian-language media, Zeman was quoted 34 times more than German president Joachim Gauck in the past three years. The Czech head is portrayed as one of the few EU leaders who refused to be ‘a puppet of the United States’.” (EUobserver.com, 2016). Zeman is often at the Russian embassy due to business interests. His campaign manager and chief economic adviser, Martin Nejedlý, “used to be a top executive at Lukoil, a Russian oil company with close ties to the Kremlin” (Fajnor, 2017). Even Babiš has spoken sympathetically of Russia, saying that NATO “cannot stay on this idea that Russia is the

biggest problem” and saying that sanctions against Russia were nonsense (Cunningham, 2015).

Figure 15: Presidents Zeman and Putin meet in Moscow, 12 May 2017.



Other politicians’ friendliness with Russia and coldness towards the EU means that, as Okamura tries to occupy this political space, he is not so unique.

Conclusion – Beyond the Czech Republic

The course of Czech far right politics is especially important to follow in this age when the Czech Republic has such interesting, noisy neighbours. This thesis concludes with speculation on potential influences on the Czech far right. Although populist illiberalism is rising across Europe, it is already well-entrenched in several Visegrád states; Polish and Hungarian leaders in particular are giving Brussels cause for concern. *The Economist* (2016) notes that Viktor Orbán pioneered Europe's illiberal wave: when his party came to power in 2010 it “limited the Hungarian constitutional court's powers, packed it with cronies and introduced a new constitution. Fidesz changed the electoral system, helping it win again in 2014 ... Public television channels were stuffed with pro-Fidesz journalists, while foreign media were taxed more heavily than domestic ones.” Orbán's party has moved further right to attract voters who might otherwise go over to Jobbik.

The European Commission has also chastened the PiS-led government in Warsaw and directed it to “amend legislation that reinforced the rule of law, urging the Polish government to stop dismantling the political checks and balance on the government's power” (VisegradGroup.eu, 2016). PiS leader Kaczyński wants to fundamentally change the Polish state by “subordinating judges to parliament, weakening local government, ‘repolonising’ local media owned by German investors, and reinventing the school system. ... [As a result,] Poland is tumbling down independent global indices of political and press freedom” (*The Economist*, 2017). Millions of young Poles become politically disengaged as they move abroad to work, which leaves elections at home under greater influence from the more

conservative, older generation—thus the domestic political scene swings to the right.

After the UK leaves the European Union, the voice of the four Visegrád countries will become more influential—thus “despite losing an ally, [the UK] the V4 countries’ predominantly anti-federalist platform could strengthen the region’s status within the EU” (VisegradGroup.eu, 2016). Following the course of these countries will become increasingly important. The V4 countries announced in 2016 that they would meet together before every EU summit, but as of mid-2017, their integration has not extended much further (Euractiv.com, 2016). Fidesz and PiS have come under the scolding of the European Commission, but as of May 2017 the consequences have been little worse than that, which gives them (and the Czech and Slovak governments) little incentive to change.

Although the general political and cultural atmosphere in these countries is similar—an overall trend towards conservatism—Czechs do not have the same inclinations towards authoritarianism as the Hungarians and Poles. Their country is economically integrated with Germany (which accounts for 31.8% of Czech exports and 29.5% of imports), and thus follows Berlin’s lead in political and diplomatic matters. The Poles and Hungarians both have strong historical grievances that the Czechs do not: Hungarians despise the Treaty of Trianon, and Poles have historical pretensions to be the hegemon of the region (having once dominated its neighbours Lithuania, Belarus, and Ukraine). The core Czech borders have been stable for hundreds of years, unlike Hungary or Poland, and the Czechs have no history of subjugating other nations; thus talk of a past glory and reviving the great nation is minor in nationalist rhetoric. Their anti-foreigner attitude is a relatively recent phenomenon—prior to the 1945 Beneš decrees that expelled

millions of Germans and Hungarians, the country was famously multicultural.¹⁹

Unlike Hungary and Poland, the Czech Republic also lacks a cohesive ethno-religious identity.²⁰ Under Jan Hus, Bohemia was one of the first nations to become Protestant, united together in the face of Catholic opposition on all sides; Catholicism is perceived by millions of Czechs as an Austrian, Habsburg imposition. Thus Czech nationalism is not connected to the state Church, as it is in Slovakia, Poland or Russia (cf. Martino and Papastathis, 2016). Additionally, the country is overwhelmingly atheist—according to a 2010 Eurobarometer Poll, a mere 16% of Czech citizens responded that they believe there is a God. Okamura (and even illiberal Zeman) has shown little interest in traditional conservative issues, such as limiting abortion or homosexual rights, and his tweets never mention Christianity (other than as a cultural foil to Islam). The Czechs are less authoritarian because their politicians are not ideological conservatives as are their counterparts in Hungary and Poland (except perhaps for the minor party, the Christian Democrats).

Based on past events, there is little evidence that the far-right parties of Poland and Hungary will strengthen Okamura or other far-right figures in a ‘contagion’ effect (as mentioned in section 2.3, he associates with Western European populists, and none from CEE). There is reason to speculate that the Visegrád group can eventually serve as a forum for exchanging illiberal ideas, but so far this has not extended further than a united front against mandatory refugee quotas;

¹⁹ At various times, Prague was home to renowned Germans such as Franz Kafka, Albert Einstein, and Ludwig van Beethoven.

²⁰ Religion often serves as a rallying point for the far right—cf. Simons and Westerlund, 2015.

In the fall 2017 parliamentary elections, chances are small that Okamura will win enough votes to move beyond the role of minor opposition partner. Czech far right parties will continue to be “singularly politically unsuccessful and electorally marginal” (Mareš 2011, 64), for the tables are stacked against any far-right anti-establishment populist. Okamura has been successful due to his charisma and the particular timing of his entry into politics, but he will suffer because his anti-elitist and anti-foreigner attitudes are not unique within Czech politics. In the coming decade, he will lose support as other charismatic mainstream politicians co-opt his positions. The Czech political and cultural atmosphere will remain illiberal, though not to the same degree as in Poland or Hungary.

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