

Czech prime minister's resignation sparks power struggle

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The resignation of Czech Prime Minister Petr Necas and the end of his center-right government has triggered a power struggle in the Czech Republic.

The former chairman of the right-wing Civic Democratic Party (ODS) resigned following a wiretapping and corruption scandal. In a raid on the seat of government the police arrested his longtime private secretary Jana Nagyova and generals involved in military intelligence. The prosecution accused Nagyova of ordering the secret service to spy on Necas' wife. According to media reports, Nagyova and Necas were having an affair.

Also involved in the scandal are three ODS deputies who blocked a government savings and tax package proposed last November. They were rewarded with lucrative positions in government-related companies in order to persuade them to give up their opposition and lay down their parliamentary mandates.

That these events took place is undisputed. For his part, Necas regards this kind of corruption as normal. "If this is a crime then you would have to arrest the entire Czech political class", Necas declared after the arrest of the three former MPs. "I support you and you support me, that's very common in politics," Necas told parliament.

In fact, the monitoring of Necas' wife by military intelligence and the bribery of three MPs are just the tip of an iceberg of corruption. "The police investigations indicate a close connection between the highest levels of Czech politics, administration, public companies and the judiciary with the so-called 'godfathers', who with a lack of transparency are involved in the awarding of public contracts", reported the conservative German think tank, the Konrad Adenauer Foundation.

According to a report by Radio Deutschland, the months-long investigation is directed against "wealthy

mafia godfathers and their stooges in politics". Over €5 million (US\$6.5 million) in cash and kilos of gold bullion have been confiscated during raids on private households.

The Czech government faces key decisions involving the awarding of public contracts worth billions. It must soon decide whether the Temelin nuclear power plant will be expanded and whether the appropriate contracts are awarded to a Russian or an American consortium. The sums involved total around €10 billion, and were apparently intercepted by the police as part of a bugging operation.

The distribution of around €20 billion, which the Czech Republic is entitled to draw from EU funds in 2014, must be decided soon. Against this background a fierce power struggle has developed in the ruling elite.

Corruption allegations against the Necas government, composed of the ODS in a coalition with the right-wing TOP09 led by Prince Karel Schwarzenberg and the neo-liberal LIDEM, are nothing new. There have been persistent rumors of corruption, abuse of office and favoritism since the government took office in the summer of 2010. For a long time the response of prosecutors and the police was restrained. The fact that a corruption scandal has now brought down the government mainly plays into the hands of President Milos Zeman and the opposition parties.

Following a very dirty election campaign, Zeman emerged as victor in the presidential election in January 2013 with about 55 percent of the vote against Foreign Minister Karel Schwarzenberg. His election campaign slogan was: "Stop this government", referring to the coalition of Necas and Schwarzenberg.

After the raid on the government headquarters, Zeman spoke with the chief of police and the attorney general and called on Necas to resign. "The evidence

presented to me is sufficient,” he said. “In the current situation the government led by Prime Minister Necas should no longer continue.” Since the president appoints the head of government, Zeman now plays a crucial role.

According to the wishes of the ODS, the president of the House of Representatives, Miroslava Nemcova, is to take over as Necas’ successor, but agreement between the coalition partners is by no means sure. In addition, the three government parties have only 99 out of 200 mandates and would need to win over the support of two more deputies.

The main opposition parties, the CSSD (Social Democratic Party) and KSCM (Communist Party), are calling for a general election and are supported by the two main union federations. According to surveys, the CSSD would win the next election by a large margin. The KSCM hopes for a share of the votes that could enable it to determine the next head of government or form a coalition with the social democrats. In line with this option it supports the right-wing policies of the CSSD.

The third option would be a government of experts similar to the regimes that governed the Czech Republic on two occasions during the past 20 years. This is the solution preferred by President Milos Zeman. The task of such a government would be to impose further unpopular austerity measures without regard to the bickering between the parties.

Zeman headed the CSSD for many years and led a Social Democratic minority government supported by the right-wing ODS from 1998 to 2002. In 2007 he left the CSSD and two years later founded the Civil Rights Party (SPOZ). Although he continues to present himself as a “left”, he is a close friend of his ultra-conservative predecessor Vaclav Klaus of the ODS.

Meanwhile, there is a closing of ground between Schwarzenberg’s TOP09 and the social democratic CSSD. Last Tuesday the two formed a coalition in Prague City Hall. In May, a coalition of the ODS and TOP09 collapsed in the capital city. Now the CSSD has agreed to tolerate a municipal government headed by top09. This is considered a signal for political cooperation between the two parties at a federal level.

The depths of corruption visible in the recent scandal, and the constant and arbitrary change of coalition partners sheds light on the character of the

“democracy” that has emerged in the Czech Republic and other Eastern European countries following the collapse of the former Stalinist regimes. The greedy cliques dominating the parties invariably emerged from the old Stalinist nomenklatura or the newly formed bourgeoisie and ruthlessly combat to divide up the spoils accruing from the selloff and exploitation of former state-owned property.

The interests of working people have no representation and the reputation of the established political elite is at a low point. A survey by the CVVM polling institute in March showed that 86 percent of all citizens distrust the country’s deputies and 79 percent mistrust the government. The ODS fared worst among the parties, with 79 percent rejecting the party.



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