

Czech Republic

by Lubomír Kopeček

Capital: Prague
Population: 10.53 million
GNI/capita, PPP: US\$28,740

Source: World Bank *World Development Indicators*.

Nations in Transit Ratings and Averaged Scores

	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
National Democratic Governance	3.00	2.75	2.75	2.75	2.75	2.75	2.75	3.00	2.75	2.75
Electoral Process	1.75	1.75	1.50	1.50	1.25	1.25	1.25	1.25	1.25	1.25
Civil Society	1.50	1.25	1.50	1.75	1.75	1.75	1.75	1.75	1.75	1.75
Independent Media	2.25	2.25	2.25	2.50	2.50	2.50	2.50	2.75	2.75	2.75
Local Democratic Governance	1.75	1.75	1.75	1.75	1.75	1.75	1.75	1.75	1.75	1.75
Judicial Framework and Independence	2.00	2.00	2.25	2.00	2.00	2.00	1.75	1.75	1.75	1.75
Corruption	3.50	3.25	3.25	3.25	3.25	3.25	3.25	3.50	3.50	3.50
Democracy Score	2.25	2.14	2.18	2.21	2.18	2.18	2.14	2.25	2.21	2.21

NOTE: The ratings reflect the consensus of Freedom House, its academic advisers, and the author(s) of this report. If consensus cannot be reached, Freedom House is responsible for the final ratings. The ratings are based on a scale of 1 to 7, with 1 representing the highest level of democratic progress and 7 the lowest. The Democracy Score is an average of ratings for the categories tracked in a given year. The opinions expressed in this report are those of the author(s).

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The year 2015 was characterized by relative government stability in the Czech Republic. Prime Minister Bohuslav Sobotka's government consisting of the Social Democrats (ČSSD), ANO, and the Christian Democrats (KDU-ČSL) experienced no destructive internal conflicts and was able to reach compromises in important matters. The lack of major electoral events also contributed to stability. This contrasts with the period prior to the 2013 parliamentary elections, which featured constant crises in the ruling coalition that weakened public confidence in the government. The current government, however, paid a political price for stability; it had to proceed slowly in implementing its agenda as significant political differences between the governing parties hindered vigorous steps. Still, the government enjoyed the public's confidence, and support for the coalition did not change significantly compared to polls after the 2013 elections. An economic boom bolstered the government's popularity, while scandals connected with some politicians from the coalition had no significant negative effect.

Conflicts of interest connected with Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance Andrej Babiš, who is also ANO party leader and owns the chemical giant Agrofert holding as well as influential media outlets, did not threaten the government's unity and confidence ratings. Although ANO's governing partners, ČSSD and KDU-ČSL, criticized Babiš for the unhealthy concentration of political, economic, and media power, they chose to adopt a pragmatic strategy toward ANO in matters of the government. Most of the opposition, especially the right-wing TOP 09 and Civic Democratic Party (ODS), tried to take advantage of Babiš's problems.

The cohesiveness of the governing coalition limited the political space for President Miloš Zeman, who had tended to take activist stances in previous years. On the issue of migration, the president received support from Babiš, and the relationship of the two leaders was much better than between Zeman and Sobotka. In the sphere of foreign policy, specifically in relation to the war in Ukraine, Zeman took pro-Russian positions, but the conflict between him and the government on this matter was less visible than in 2014.

The president's decision to speak at a rally organized by radical antirefugee activists in November sparked political tensions. Public response was strengthened by the fact that the event took place at the same time as anniversary celebrations marking the country's independence. Both the governing ČSSD and KDU-ČSL and the opposition ODS and TOP 09 strongly condemned the president's actions.

The issue of migration and refugees, predominantly from the Middle East and North Africa, gained increased significance during the year. Anti-immigration and anti-Islam initiatives and formations received much attention in the public sphere. The Czech Republic was not a target country for most migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers but merely a transit to neighboring Germany. The country's restrictive policy on granting asylum, less welcoming societal attitudes than in Germany, and lack of larger immigrant communities all contributed to this. Among Czech citizens, fear and misconceptions about the refugees' goals and background prevailed, exacerbated by concerns about Islam. Since Czech society is highly homogenous, other culturally, linguistically, and religiously distinct elements are often seen as a danger. President Zeman took advantage of this perception in adopting his anti-Islam and anti-immigration stance. At the same time, voices calling for solidarity with the refugees also emerged, and the public remained divided over the issue.

Nevertheless, Sobotka's government mostly followed the public's anti-refugee sentiment. The cabinet has repeatedly refused the idea of a mandatory immigrant quota for the Czech Republic, which was promoted by the European Union (EU) and some EU countries strongly affected by the wave of refugees, but it was willing to agree to voluntary acceptance of a smaller number of refugees. The European Council's decision to approve mandatory quotas provoked a wave of dissatisfaction in the Czech Republic at the end of September. A segment of the opposition sharply criticized the cabinet for failing to stop the adoption of quotas.

No score changes.

Outlook for 2016: The government's stability is relatively safe in 2016, but only if the ruling parties maintain their pragmatic interest in upholding the existing heterogeneous coalition. Regional and Senate elections could weaken the parties' loyalty to the government and strengthen the confrontational tendencies within. Controversies surrounding ANO leader Andrej Babiš and his economic interests, or other scandals connected with government politicians, could also undermine the coalition.

On the other hand, the government will probably benefit from economic growth, and also from fragmentation of the opposition and the lack of a clear alternative to the current coalition cabinet. The government's policy agenda will likely be implemented slowly and with caution. The migrant crisis will continue to have a significant impact on Czech politics and society and may disrupt government unity. The gap between a well-educated urban population advocating for tolerance and the majority of the society that rejects refugees will provide an opportunity for political mobilization, which could be exploited by President Zeman and others.

MAIN REPORT

National Democratic Governance

2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
3.00	2.75	2.75	2.75	2.75	2.75	2.75	3.00	2.75	2.75

- Despite significant political differences between the current governing parties—the left-wing Social Democrats (ČSSD), Andrej Babiš’s ANO, and the center-right Christian Democrats (KDU-ČSL)—the coalition enjoyed stability throughout 2015. Party elites attacked each other at their party congress,¹ but at the government level, an effort to attenuate conflicts and seek political compromises prevailed. Positive confidence ratings,² the lack of national elections, and a good economic performance (GDP grew more than 4 percent in the first half of the year, while unemployment was the lowest since 2009)³ contributed to government stability.
- There were some disagreements in the governing coalition and repeated debates around the role of Minister of Finance and ANO leader Andrej Babiš. In May, a dispute over Babiš’s conflicts of interest in business led to a vote of no confidence in the parliament. The opposition parties TOP 09, Civic Democratic Party (ODS), and Dawn (Úsvit) initiated the vote; the biggest debate was about maintaining tax concessions for biofuel since its largest producer belongs to the Agrofert holding group owned by Babiš.⁴ The vote was ultimately unsuccessful.
- In June, ČSSD deputy Ladislav Šinčl criticized the Insurance Act amendment promoted by Babiš and claimed that the minister had intimidated him during the negotiations. The controversy led to withdrawal of the amendment from the parliament.⁵ Earlier in mid-February, Minister of Justice Helena Válková (ANO) resigned from office, mentioning pressure from her party. Babiš claimed that she resigned voluntarily, but Válková said that negative coverage in *Lidové noviny* (a daily owned by Babiš) was partly to blame.⁶ Some commentaries argued that the minister upset Babiš because she had not consulted him about important staffing and other decisions in the justice sphere.⁷
- The government approved a new foreign policy concept in July. The first draft prompted strong reactions in 2014, but the new version excluded controversial topics such as the mention of reform communism as an inspirational source. The concept also contained stronger emphasis on human rights and democracy promotion, and stiffened the Czech Republic’s policy towards Russia.⁸ A US military convoy passing from an exercise in the Baltics to Germany attracted much attention in March and became a major topic of political debate. The transit received a mostly positive response, except for minor protests by left-wing groups.⁹
- Following a diplomatic spat, President Miloš Zeman announced in April that the “door of the presidential castle is closed” to US ambassador Andrew Schapiro.¹⁰ Zeman reacted to the ambassador’s televised comments objecting to the president’s planned visit to Moscow to attend World War II commemorations. While the two returned to friendly terms later and the issue did not affect relations with the US, Zeman’s May visit to Moscow caused controversy at home. Government politicians reacted with reserve, but the right-wing ODS and TOP 09 criticized Zeman’s decision to visit Russia after it emerged that the country was engaged in the war in Ukraine.
- Although the Czech Republic was much less affected than most EU countries, the biggest political issue of 2015 was the wave of refugees coming mainly from Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, and North Africa. Due to a strict asylum policy, less welcoming social system, and lack of larger immigrant communities, refugees and migrants considered the Czech Republic merely a transit country in heading to Germany. During the year, Sobotka’s government offered financial, material, and professional help to protect the EU’s free movement zone (the so-called Schengen zone), but refused to accept mandatory quotas for the redistribution of refugees in the country. The opposition also

refused mandatory quotas. In June, the government nevertheless agreed to voluntarily accept a number of refugees from other EU countries, which was met with disapproval from a segment of the opposition. ODS leader Petr Fiala argued that this move by the government was a de facto acceptance of the principle of quotas.¹¹ President Zeman spoke up not only against the quota but against accepting any refugees from Arab countries. He also linked migration and terrorism.¹²

- The European Council’s decision to approve mandatory quotas led to a wave of public dissatisfaction in the Czech Republic at the end of September. Some opposition politicians sharply criticized the cabinet for failing to stop the adoption of quotas and join Slovakia and Hungary in taking the decision to the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU). The increasing refugee wave prompted some politicians to change their opinions. In September, Babiš spoke up in favor of NATO involvement, closing the Schengen borders, and sinking human smugglers’ ships.¹³ When Germany and Austria imposed border controls in September, ODS leader Fiala called upon the Czech Republic to do the same.¹⁴ TOP 09 leader Karel Schwarzenberg, on the contrary, said that anti-refugee attitudes were hysterical and argued in favor of accepting more refugees.¹⁵
- On the double anniversary of the Velvet Revolution and International Students Day (commemorating the Nazi crackdown on Czech Universities), President Zeman appeared at a rally together with a group of anti-refugees activists. The rally, which was attended by the head of the radical Block Against Islam, Martin Konvička, took place at the symbolic site for the anniversary in Prague-Albertov. Zeman stated he is against media manipulation, the “so-called elites,” and migration, and claimed most migrants are “young, well-fed men” who should be fighting for their country's freedom.¹⁶ The president’s statements were met with negative responses from the public, and many criticized the fact that a group of university and student representatives were not allowed to enter Albertov. All mainstream politicians condemned the president’s approach. Prime Minister Sobotka said that Zeman “legitimizes the spread of xenophobia and hatred in a very extreme form.”¹⁷ The only exception was ANO, whose leader Babiš agreed with the president. Zeman confirmed this anti-immigrant attitude in his “Christmas Speech,” declaring that the Czech Republic faces “an organized invasion and not a spontaneous movement of refugees.”¹⁸ His popularity, probably thanks to these attitudes, subsequently rose; in December, 59 percent of respondents said they trusted the president.¹⁹
- Fear of terrorism and increasingly negative public attitudes toward Islam and Muslims influenced the debate over migration throughout the year. According to a December survey by the Prague-based Centre for Public Opinion Research (CVVM), 60 percent of respondents refused to accept refugees from war zones, 30 percent supported the temporary hosting of refugees, and only 2 percent supported their permanent settling. There were significant differences based on origin: 79 percent refused accepting refugees from the Middle East and North Africa, while only 48 percent had the same opinion about refugees from Ukraine.²⁰

Electoral Process

2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
1.75	1.75	1.50	1.50	1.25	1.25	1.25	1.25	1.25	1.25

- In June, the Constitutional Court rejected the Supreme Administrative Court’s proposal to abolish the 5-percent electoral threshold for European Parliament (EP) elections.²¹ The Constitutional Court stressed that the threshold is compatible with the principles of rule of law and democracy. The proposal had been initiated in 2014 by two small parties, the Green Party (SZ) and the Pirate Party, which had failed to pass the threshold for EP elections in spring of that year. Earlier, the Supreme Administrative Court had ruled that the threshold should be abolished.
- In July, the government submitted to the parliament extensive changes to existing laws on political party and campaign financing, which could increase the transparency of political competition. The

new provisions would require, among other things, the establishment of a special institution to oversee party funding, and set limits on private donations to parties as well as to election campaign spending.²² The law is currently pending in the parliament.

Civil Society

2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
1.50	1.25	1.50	1.75	1.75	1.75	1.75	1.75	1.75	1.75

- Civil society in the Czech Republic is vibrant, with a large number of active organizations. As of May 2015, there were 495 foundations, 1,442 trust funds, 2,912 public benefit organizations, and 87,698 societies.²³ The new Civil Code, effective as of January 2014, significantly changed the legal status of organizations and related regulations. These modifications included transferring the registration of civil society entities to courts, which have in some cases failed to cope with the increased paperwork. Court registration fees also posed a problem for many nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), but as of January 2015, the government temporarily exempted them from paying these fees.
- The funding of NGOs did not change significantly in 2015, but the start of the 2014–20 EU programming period opened up new possibilities for some. Most NGOs still rely on public funding, such as state, municipal, and regional budgets, and EU funds. One of the largest NGOs, the Fund for Children in Need, experienced financial problems during the year. The fund’s management, which was replaced in June, claimed that the main issue was a legal change that deprived the fund of some state subsidies. The Ministry of Labor, on the other hand, said the fund “failed to adapt the scope of its activities to its actual financial capacity.”²⁴ Eventually, the fund had to close some of its facilities and lay off employees after failing to secure additional state subsidies. President Zeman used the occasion to criticize the government, and pointed out that the amount needed to help refugees would be much higher. Prime Minister Sobotka reacted by saying that the president should not “pander to society’s worst feelings and help the spread of animosity towards refugees.”²⁵
- The refugee crisis and fear of Islam dominated public discussion and mobilized society in 2015. The most visible radical movement was “We Don’t Want Islam in the Czech Republic,” which grew during the year from a small Facebook group to 160,000 online supporters. The movement organized several anti-Islam demonstrations during the year and drew up a petition against mandatory quotas. The petition became one of the most successful petitions in Czech history. In June, the movement established an association called Block Against Islam and agreed to collaborate with the parliamentary party Dawn. The party’s leader, Tomio Okamura, left Dawn after a conflict in spring 2015 and went on to found a new anti-Islam formation called Freedom and Direct Democracy.²⁶
- Numerous anti-refugees and anti-Islam demonstrations were held during the year, usually with only a few hundred participants. Besides the November 17 demonstration (see “National Democratic Governance”), another controversial protest took place at the beginning of July in Prague city center organized by the small extreme-right National Democracy. The demonstrators chanted slogans about leaving the EU and closing the borders, and called Czech politicians traitors, threatening them with fake gallows. The police did not take action but briefly detained several counterprotesters. Most parliamentary parties condemned the detentions.²⁷
- There were also initiatives welcoming refugees, but they had limited impact. In August, for example, a petition titled “Scientists against Fear and Indifference” was drawn up in support of accepting refugees. The Consortium of Migrants Assisting Organizations took a similar stance and requested changing the asylum process. A number of NGOs, especially church-based organizations, collected clothes and food to help refugees, as well as other forms of support.²⁸

Independent Media

2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
2.25	2.25	2.25	2.50	2.50	2.50	2.50	2.75	2.75	2.75

- At the ČSSD congress in March, party leader and Prime Minister Bohuslav Sobotka sharply criticized ANO leader Andrej Babiš, who, according to him, “concentrates political, economic, and media power to an extent unparalleled since 1989.”²⁹ While ČSSD congress documents signaled an intention to change legislation on media concentration, ČSSD politicians’ statements after the congress were more cautious. Sobotka claimed in June that there should be “a certain barrier that would prevent a single business or a few businesses from completely controlling the media environment,” but added that he did not see such tendencies in Babiš.³⁰
- President Miloš Zeman repeatedly criticized the public channel Czech Television (ČT). In March, he claimed that the television “fails to fulfil its public function,” and accused it indirectly of a connection to the opposition TOP 09.³¹ Babiš’s economic holding Agrofert also complained about ČT, referring several of its programs to the Czech Television Council as biased. Some commentators argued that Zeman and Babiš exerted pressure on the channel, impinging on its independence.³²
- After the outbreak of war in Ukraine, visibly biased pro-Russian media, especially outlets providing news in Czech (such as *aeronet.cz*), ramped up their presence in the country. This activity increased especially before the US military convoy passed through the Czech Republic in March. According to an intelligence service report published in September, these websites “convey or impose Russian opinions and arguments ... in such a way that common citizens can assume that they are not receiving Russian ideas, but the opinions and beliefs of Czech citizens.”³³ The *neovlivni.cz* investigative website listed 18 such media outlets.³⁴
- There is an ongoing trend of prominent local businessmen buying up media outlets from foreign owners. The German owner of Vltava-Labe-Press announced in August the sale of the publisher to the Czech and Slovak investment group Penta. Vltava-Labe-Press is the second-largest entity in the print market with a network of regional dailies and weeklies, as well as one of the most popular news websites. Penta has a controversial reputation due to the 2011 Gorilla scandal in Slovakia, in which the group allegedly bribed politicians. The change of ownership, however, was not accompanied by resignations as occurred in 2014 in Slovakia when Penta bought the daily *Sme*, or in 2013 after the purchase of the media group Mafra by Babiš. Marek Dospiva, co-owner of Penta, said that the reasons for buying the publishing house were not only economic but also to positively influence the owners’ own image and to “protect themselves from irrational attacks.”³⁵ This confirmed long-term efforts by businessmen to secure positive coverage and support.
- Several newly established news websites and investigative media outlets remained active, including the daily *Echo24*, the monthly *Reportér*, *Neovlivni.cz*, all of which were founded after 2013 by journalists who had left outlets controlled by Babiš.

Local Democratic Governance

2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
1.75	1.75	1.75	1.75	1.75	1.75	1.75	1.75	1.75	1.75

- Mayors and local assemblies maintain high confidence ratings. Similar to the previous year, in 2015 about three-fifths of respondents said they trusted local institutions. This level of confidence is considerably higher than that for the president, the government, or either chamber of the parliament. Regional governors and regional assemblies fare worse than municipal representatives, with about two-fifths of respondents expressing trust in them.³⁶

- Local by-elections took place in several dozen of the Czech Republic’s over 6,000 municipalities, but these had little effect on national politics. Most by-elections occurred because municipalities had failed to draw up candidate lists for the fall 2014 elections, or because elected politicians failed to set up executive bodies due to disagreements. In several municipalities, elections were repeated due to electoral fraud. The biggest municipality to hold a rerun was Chomutov, with nearly 50,000 inhabitants and significant social problems. Several people were charged with fraud and vote buying.³⁷ Similar problems had already occurred in some municipalities during previous local elections.
- The fragile local coalition of ANO, ČSSD, and Trojkoalice [coalition of the Green Party (SZ), KDU-ČSL, and formation of Mayors and Independents (STAN)] in the capital Prague had numerous disputes in 2015. The biggest conflict was over new building regulations. In the past, the construction market was ridden by rumors of nontransparent decision-making and political connections between representatives, councilors, and construction companies.³⁸ Prague mayor Adriana Krnáčová, appointed by ANO, provoked a coalition crisis in August when she withdrew the building regulations agenda from an SZ deputy. The same week, the mayor lost a no-confidence vote triggered by local ANO leaders and representatives in Prague. Eventually, ANO leader Babiš announced that he supported Krnáčová, which ensured her survival as mayor,³⁹ but infighting led to collapse of the coalition in November. A new coalition had yet to form by year’s end.
- Local coalitions experienced internal disputes—triggered primarily by ANO representatives—in many other cities, including České Budějovice, Brno, Ústí nad Labem, Karlovy Vary, and Opava. This resulted in general instability for local governments.

Judicial Framework and Independence

2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
2.00	2.00	2.25	2.00	2.00	2.00	1.75	1.75	1.75	1.75

- At the beginning of February, the government agreed to retroactively pay judges and public prosecutors, who had received less than required by law over the previous three years. The agreement between judges and prosecutors and Minister of Justice Helena Válková was a reaction to the Supreme Court’s December 2014 verdict that the state had incorrectly calculated their salaries. The parties agreed that judges and prosecutors would be partly compensated for the unpaid money.⁴⁰
- In May, the Prague district court acquitted Jana Nečasová (formerly Nagyová) of misconduct and abuse of public office in the Military Intelligence Service. Besides Nečasová, the court also acquitted three Military Intelligence officers. As chief of staff of former prime minister Petr Nečas, whom she later married, Nečasová had been charged for illegally commissioning the officers to spy on the prime minister’s then wife, Radka Nečasová. The arrest of Nečasová and other people connected to the scandal led to the fall of the Nečas government in June 2013. In its ruling, the district court accepted Nečas’s testimony that it was he who had assigned those tasks to the Military Intelligence officers in order to reveal any security risks to his family and himself.⁴¹ The prosecution appealed the sentence. In March, the public prosecutor’s office initiated another investigation against Nečasová for failing to pay taxes on gifts she had received as chief of staff. Former prime minister Nečas was charged with bribery in February 2014, but his case had yet to begin at year’s end.
- The long-standing debate over a new law on the Public Prosecutor’s Office continued. The new minister of justice, Robert Pelikán, presented a draft in March that would give a larger role and greater independence to the Supreme Public Prosecutor’s Office in the judiciary, abolish its subordinate, the High Public Prosecutor’s Offices, and establish a new special anticorruption office.⁴² This draft is similar to the politically controversial version prepared during the Nečas government. Its fate was uncertain at year’s end.

Corruption

2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
3.50	3.25	3.25	3.25	3.25	3.25	3.25	3.50	3.50	3.50

- According to a CVVM survey from March, two-thirds of Czechs believe that most or all public offices are involved in corruption. This reflected, however, a slight improvement compared to the 2014 survey where three-fourths of people had the same opinion.⁴³
- At the end of July, the government approved an amendment to the law on conflict of interest that aims to increase the transparency of politicians' asset declarations and boost the fight against corruption. The law was approved after the deadline originally set by Justice Minister Jiří Dienstbier. There was a similar delay in the preparation of a law extending the powers of the Supreme Audit Office to include the financial auditing of municipalities and other public institutions.
- In July, former ČSSD regional governor of the Central Bohemian Region, David Rath, was sentenced to eight and a half years in prison and a fine of nearly one million dollars for bribe taking, corruption, and bid rigging.⁴⁴ His trial was one of the most widely covered by media in Czech history. Rath had had a successful career, which also included positions as minister of health and president of the Czech Medical Chamber. The proceedings were extremely long partly due to Rath's delay tactics; the police arrested him in May 2012 but the trial did not start until August 2013. Rath appealed the ruling of Prague's High Court.
- The new Law on Civil Service, passed by the parliament in the previous year, came into effect in July. Shortly before, several ministries made staffing changes, including offices of vice-ministers and chiefs of sections. The new rules essentially cemented high-level ministerial positions, making it difficult to lay off any of the new appointments.⁴⁵ Several days after the law came into effect, the Constitutional Court dismissed President Zeman's proposal to abolish parts of the legislation, and only obliged him regarding a single partial matter allowing heads of several central offices to oppose the government in cutting jobs or employee salaries.
- Following the adoption of the 2014 Law on Civil Service, in June 2015 the government adopted a regulation, the first of its kind, to set up whistleblowing mechanisms in civil service. Experts, however, criticized the regulation and its limited scope, claiming that it provides whistleblowers with little protection.⁴⁶
- There were a number of high-level corruption scandals in 2015. In August, allegations came to light that a ČSSD party member had demanded a bribe from a businessman involved in a lawsuit with the state-controlled Czech Post. A portion of the bribe was allegedly meant for the ČSSD minister of interior, Milan Chovanec, as the Czech Post belongs to his ministry. The National Security Council also addressed the allegations in August.⁴⁷ The minister managed to survive the scandal with Prime Minister Sobotka's support, but the police investigation was ongoing at year's end. In October, regional governor of the Olomouc region and ČSSD member Jiří Rozbořil was accused of bribing police officers. The governor refused to resign despite pressure from ČSSD leadership.
- According to the media, ANO deputy chairman and mayor of Prague 1 district Radmila Kleslová had a consulting agreement with the partly state-owned enterprise ČEZ, from which she was receiving monthly compensation at about four times the average salary in the country.⁴⁸ This prompted a debate in September over discrepancies between ANO's proclamations before the 2013 elections—when the party criticized politicians enriching themselves at the expense of the state—and their subsequent policies. Under pressure, Kleslová resigned in September from her position as deputy chairman of ANO and later also from other public and party offices.
- In November, the parliament adopted a law that requires the publication of all contracts exceeding CZK 50,000 (US\$2,000) signed by public institutions, municipalities, and state enterprises. The law

had already been introduced in the parliament in December 2013, but discussions proceeded slowly. The Reconstruction of the State platform, which comprises several NGOs that pressed for passing the law and other anti-corruption regulations, pointed out that the delay means the law's effects will not be felt before the next government.⁴⁹ Some government institutions, such as the Ministry of Finance, as well as various municipalities began publishing their contracts even without the law.

- In the second half of 2015, the Chamber of Deputies discussed a law introducing electronic evidence for revenues, which was proposed by the government coalition and heavily advocated by Andrej Babiš. The law would require the recording of every business payment in a central data repository on the internet. The government's chief argument in adopting the new procedure is to improve tax collection. Right-wing opposition parties ODS and TOP 09 obstructed the law's passage, criticizing the bureaucratic demands of the regulation on businesses, the high cost of implementation, and the fact that Babiš, as minister of finance and one of the biggest entrepreneurs in the country, could use the information gathered from various businesses to his advantage.⁵⁰

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¹ “Andrej Babiš adopts combative tone following re-election as ANO leader,” Radio Prague, Czech Radio, 2 March 2015, <http://www.czech.cz/en/News/Andrej-Babis-adopts-combative-tone-following-re-el>

² Nearly half of the respondents said they trusted the government. See “Důvěra ústavním institucím v září 2015” [Confidence in constitutional institutions in September 2015], CVVM, September 2015, http://cvvm.soc.cas.cz/media/com_form2content/documents/c1/a7421/f3/pi150925.pdf

³ Lenka Ponikelska and Peter Laca, “Czech Economy Races to EU's Fastest Growth on Weak Koruna Policy,” Bloomberg, 15 May 2015, <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2015-05-15/czech-gdp-growth-unexpectedly-soars-to-record-on-manufacturing>; “Unemployment rate by sex and age - monthly average,” Eurostat, 21 January 2016, http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/en/web/products-datasets/-/UNE_RT_M

⁴ “Kalousek: Babišův zákon o biopalivech je tunel na státní rozpočet” [Kalousek: Babiš's Act on biofuel is siphoning off funds from state budget], Česká televize, 15 March 2015, <http://www.ceskatelevize.cz/ct24/ekonomika/1511846-kalousek-babisuv-zakon-o-biopalivech-je-tunel-na-statni-rozpocet>

⁵ “Czech press survey – 19 June,” ČTK, 19 June 2015, <http://www.ceskenoviny.cz/zpravy/czech-press-survey-june-19/1229343>

⁶ Radim Vaculík, “Válková: Vyzvali mě, abych skončila co nejdřív” [Válková: They asked me to resign as soon as possible.], novinky.cz, 16 February 2015, <http://www.novinky.cz/domaci/361751-valkova-vyzvali-me-abych-skoncila-co-nejdriv-moje-rozhodnuti-to-nebylo.html>

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