



## CZECH REPUBLIC

### ■ The country on the eve of elections

The Czech Republic experienced a major crisis towards the end of the 1990s, with a series of banks going bankrupt; since then, the country has gone through a phase of recovery, sealed in 2004 by its entry into the European Union. Although it is considered an exemplary case of successful transition from a Socialist system to a market economy, the country is still experiencing some problems, from high levels of corruption to the current account and budget deficit. The latter factor could, in fact, put paid to Prague's hopes of entering the euro area by 2010.

The restructuring of the health and pensions sectors was the central theme of the electoral campaign for re-election to the Chamber of Deputies in June 2006. However, the vote revealed a country split in two: the incumbent Prime Minister Mirek Topolánek a conservative, heads a minority cabinet that has twice failed to win a confidence vote. The extremely lengthy Czech political crisis could end with early elections in spring.

### ■ Voting: how and for whom

On 20 and 21 October 2006, Czech citizens over 18

\_Reorganization of the public health and pension systems was at the heart of the election campaign for the renewal of the Czech Republic's Chamber of Deputies

years of age renewed a third of the 81 seats in the Senate (Senát). As no candidate obtained an absolute majority, a second round was held on 27 and 28 October. Senators are elected in single-member constituencies on the basis of a two-round majority system; if no candidate obtains an absolute majority, a second round with the two candidates having obtained the largest number of votes is held a week later.

Although the Senate elects the head of State together with the Chamber of Deputies and is exclusively responsible for nominating the judges of the constitutional court, it does not accord or deny confidence in the government and therefore plays a marginal political role.

### ■ The elections

The Senate elections were held to the backdrop of the political paralysis that gripped the country following the June 2006 legislative elections to the Chamber of Deputies. Mirek Topolánek, the leader of the Civic

**THE CZECH REPUBLIC IN FIGURES**

Area	78.866 kmq
Capital	Prague (1.183.729 ab.)
Population, 2006	10.265.231
Ethnic groups	Czechs 90.4%, Moravian 3.7%, Slovak 1.9%, other 4%
Religions	Catholic 26.8%, Protestant 2.1%, others and Atheist 71.1%
Languages	Czech
Currency	1 crown = 27.735 euro (10/01/2007)
International dialling code	+420
Web domain	.cz

Sources: Cia, Wb, Ecb

**FREEDOMS IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC**

Death penalty	Abolitionist
Index of political rights	1
Index of civil liberties	1
Status	Free country
Assessment of the elections by international observers	n. a.

Note: points go from 1 (total freedom) to 7 (lack of freedom)

Sources: Amnesty International, Freedom House

**ECONOMY AND QUALITY OF LIFE**

GDP (PPP), 2005	160.27 bln €
GDP growth, 2005	+6%
GDP per capita (PPP) – 232 countries, 2005	15.674 € (54)
Competitiveness index (125 countries), 2006	29
Human development index (177 countries)	30
Index of women's representation in power	28
Year women received active and passive right to vote	1920
Life expectancy, 2006	76.2 years
Combined primary, secondary and tertiary enrolment	80.5%

Sources: UNDP, WB, WEF

Democratic Party (ODS), had hoped that the elections would provide a political push to break the deadlock with the minority centre-right coalition partners who support his cabinet. Although his party led 26 of the 27 constituencies participating in the elections after the first round, the final result gave the ODS only a modest win, reduced in part by the success of the Social Democrats (CSSD) and the fact that the Christian Democratic

Union–Czechoslovak People's Party (KDU-CSL), a member of the centre-right coalition with the small Green Party, lost ground. As a result, the political crisis has become even more convoluted, with the added complication of a sharp dispute between the prime minister and the President of the Republic, who opposes the formation of a government supported by the election of Social Democrat defectors.

**BULGARIA****■ The country on the eve of elections**

In 2004, after a lengthy run-up, the country re-gained its standard of living prior to 1990. The Bulgarian economy has grown at a steady pace of 4-5% a year since the end of the 1990s and this positive trend, together with significant reforms, made it possible for Sofia to join the European Union on 1 January 2007.

Since the mid-1990s, Bulgarian political life has gone through a series of traumatic changes, from the return to power of the Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP), the heir to the former single party, to the victory of the conservatives in 1997 and the sudden rise of the National Movement Simeon II (NDS), founded by the former monarch in 2001. In a further twist, the last parliamentary elections in 2005 saw the victory of the Socialists and the defeat of the NDS. Since August of that year, Bulgaria has been led by the Socialist Prime Minister Sergey Stanishev at the head of a large coalition comprising the BSP, the NSD and the Movement for Rights and Freedoms (DPS), which represents the Turkish minority. The October 2006 presidential elections were viewed as a significant indicator of the popularity of the Stanishev government.

**■ Voting: how and for whom**

On 22 and 29 October 2006, Bulgarian citizens over 18 years of age elected the President of the Republic. The head of State is elected by direct universal suffrage under a two-round system. The candidate who obtains

**CZECH REPUBLIC: POLITICAL ELECTIONS OF 20-21 OCTOBER 2006**

Party	seats 2006	total
Civic Democratic Party (Ods)	14	41
Czech Social Democratic Party (Cssd)	6	12
Christian Democratic Union - Czechoslovak People's Party (Kdu-Csl)	4	10
Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (Kscm)	/	2
Green Party (Sz)	/	1
Independent and other parties	3	1
Total (women)	27 (6)	81

Source: Ipu

**BULGARIA IN FIGURES**

Area	110,912 sq. km
Capital	Sofia (1,246,791 inhab.)
Population (2006)	7,385,367
Ethnic groups	Bulgarians 83.9%, Turkish 9.4%, Roma 4.7%, others 2%
Religions	Orthodox 82.6%, Muslim 12.2%, others 5.2%
Languages	Bulgarian 84.5%, Turkish 9.6%, Roma 4.1%, others 1.8%
Currency	1 lev = 1.955 € (10/01/2007)
International dialling code	+359
Web domain	.bg

Sources: Cia, Wb, Ecb

**FREEDOMS IN BULGARIA**

Death penalty	Abolitionist
Index of political rights	1
Index of civil liberties	2
Status	Free country
Assessment of the elections by international observers	/

Note: points go from 1 (total freedom) to 7 (lack of freedom)

Sources: Amnesty International, Freedom House

**ECONOMY AND QUALITY OF LIFE**

GDP (PPP), 2005	55.18 bln €
GDP growth, 2005	+5.5%
GDP per capita (PPP) – 232 countries, 2005	7.391 € (89)
Competitiveness index (125 countries), 2006	72
Human development index (177 countries), 2003	54
Index of women's representation in power, (75 countries), 2003	37
Year women received active and passive right to vote	1945
Life expectancy, 2006	72.3 years
Combined primary, secondary and tertiary enrolment	80.5%

Sources: UNDP, WB, WEF

an absolute majority of the votes is elected; otherwise a second tour is organised for the two candidates with the largest number of votes. A turnout of over 50% is required to be able to win the first tour, failing which a second ballot is held in any case.

The Bulgarian President enjoys powers similar to those of the Italian head of State, primarily exercising his role as guarantor and ensuring that the Constitution is respected in the law-making process, although any veto he imposes may be overridden by a simple majority vote in Parliament.

**The elections**

The October 2006 presidential elections once again confirmed the unpredictability of the Bulgarian electorate. The outgoing President Georgi Parvanov, a Socialist, stood for election and obtained an overwhelming victory in the first round with 64% of the vote. However, a second round had to be organised because of the low turnout of merely 42.51 percent. Surprisingly, Parvanov's challenger was not the candidate of the conservative forces Nedelcho Beronov but rather the ultra nationalist Volen Siderov, leader of the "Attack!" party. Parvanov, who easily defeated his challenger with 76% of the vote, thereby became the first Bulgarian President to be re-elected. Siderov did however obtain 150,000 additional votes in the second round, guaranteeing his party a secure political future.

**LATVIA****The country on the eve of elections**

Latvia experienced continuous economic growth from the early 1990s on, with the exception of 1996, which was marked by a serious banking crisis, and 1998, the year of Russia's financial collapse. The country, which currently enjoys the highest growth rate in Europe, has transformed its economic system to encourage trade and financial services. The State presence in the economy is now limited to a few big companies. Although Latvia has largely succeeded in reducing inflation and the deficit, its economic growth raises some questions, as it has had an excessive impact on the growth of private consumption and the resulting household debt. In 2004, the country celebrated its entry into NATO and the European Union; the government wishes to join the euro area from 2008, but the doubts related to the stability of its economic results in the medium term could slow down this process. The main issues facing politicians are the fight against corruption and the condition of the Russian minority. Important public figures have in fact been involved in a large number of scandals, leading to a general instability marked by governments of short duration and a sudden downturn in the political fortunes of the parties involved in the scandals. The protection of the rights of the

**BULGARIA: PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS OF 22 AND 29 OCTOBER 2006**

Candidate	1st round	2st round
Georgi Parvanov	64.05%	75.95%
Volen Siderov	21.49%	24.05%
Nedelcho Beronov	9.75%	/
Others	4.71	/

Source: Cik

**LATVIA IN FIGURES**

Area	64,589 sq. km
Capital	Riga (727,578 inhab.)
Population (2006)	2,274,735
Ethnic groups	Latvian 57.7%, Russian 29.6%, Belarusian 4.1%, Ukrainian 2.7%, Polish 2.5%, Lithuanian 1.4%, other 2%
Religions	Lutheran, Catholic, Russian-Orthodox
Languages	Latvian 58.2%, Russian 37.5%, Lithuanian and other 4.3%
Currency	1 lats = 1.422 € (12/01/2007)
International dialling code	+371
Web domain	.lv

Sources: Cia, Wb, Ecb

**FREEDOMS IN LATVIA**

Death penalty	Abolitionist
Index of political rights	1
Index of civil liberties	1
Status	Free country
Assessment of the elections by international observers	/

Note: points go from 1 (total freedom) to 7 (lack of freedom)

Sources: Amnesty International, Freedom House

**ECONOMY AND QUALITY OF LIFE**

GDP (PPP), 2005	24.23 bln €
GDP growth, 2005	10.2%
GDP per capita (PPP) – 232 countries, 2005	10,551 € (71)
Competitiveness index (125 countries), 2006	36
Human development index (177 countries), 2006	45
Index of women's representation in power, (75 countries), 2006	27
Year women received active and passive right to vote	1918
Life expectancy, 2006	71 years
Combined primary, secondary and tertiary enrolment	90%

Sources: Undp, Wb, Wef

Russian-speaking element, which makes up over a third of the total population, is unsatisfactory, to the point that even today, nearly one Latvian in five is deprived of citizenship. The segregation of the minority Russian-speaking parties has encouraged the creation of the centre-right coalitions that have in fact always governed Latvia.

**■ Voting: how and for whom**

On 7 October 2006, Latvian citizens over 18 years of age elected the 100 members of the Latvian parliament (Saeima) through a party list proportional system with a 5% threshold. The country is divided into 5 multi-member constituencies that elect a number of deputies on the basis of the resident population. Each voter votes for a list and can indicate a preference for or reject candidates within the list. Each deputy is assigned the votes obtained by his or her party after subtracting or adding rejections or preferences; those with the most votes are therefore elected, with their number corresponding to the seats assigned to each political party.

The Saeima accords and denies confidence in the government.

**■ The elections**

Two new elements marked the 7 October elections: the concrete possibility that voters would re-elect the government of the conservative Aigars Kalvitis for the first time in the country's recent history, and the split of the coalition of Russian-speaking parties, which stood for election through the new Harmony Centre party (SC) to challenge the traditional For Human Rights in a United Latvia party (PCTVL). The prime minister's coalition, composed of his People's Party (TP), the conservative New Era party (JL), the centrist Union of Greens and Farmers (ZZS) and the populist Latvia's First Party (LPP) was reduced to a minority by the defection of the JL and the accusations of vote buying involving the Transport minister and leader of the LPP. Despite the problems and scandals, Kalvitis's three-party coalition won the elections, albeit by a slim majority. The PM then signed an agreement with the nationalist For the Homeland and Freedom Party (TB/LNNK) to ensure a significant majority in Parliament. The Russian-speaking area witnessed the victory of the new Harmony Centre party, which however lost 2 seats overall.

**LATVIA: POLITICAL ELECTIONS OF 7 OCTOBER 2006**

Party	seats 2006	seats 2002
People's Party (Tp)	23	20
Union of Greens and Farmers (Zzs)	18	12
New Era (Jl)	18	26
Harmony Centre (Sc)	17	/
Latvia's First Party / Latvian Way (Lpp/Lc)	10	10
For the Homeland and Freedom /Lnnk (Tb/Lnnk)	8	7
For Human Rights in a United Latvia (Pctvl)	6	25
Total (women)	100 (19)	100 (21)

Source: Ipu