



Freedom in the World 2017 - Czech Republic

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Freedom Status: Free

Aggregate Score: 94 (0 = Least Free, 100 = Most Free)

Freedom Rating: 1.0 (1 = Most Free, 7 = Least Free)

Political Rights: 1 (1 = Most Free, 7 = Least Free)

Civil Liberties: 1 (1 = Most Free, 7 = Least Free)

Quick Facts

Population: 10,600,000

Capital: Prague

GDP/capita: \$17,548

Press Freedom Status: Free

OVERVIEW

The Czech Republic is a parliamentary democracy in which political rights and civil liberties are generally respected. However, the country has experienced problems related to corruption and organized crime since its transition to democracy in 1990, and severe economic disparities between the majority community and the Romani minority are persistent. In recent years, illiberal rhetoric has become more common in the public sphere.

Key Developments in 2016:

- The Movement of Dissatisfied Citizens (ANO) party, led by Deputy Prime Minister Andrej Babiš, won October's regional elections. Observers suggested that the victory may presage a strong showing for the ANO in parliamentary elections scheduled for 2017.
- In March, the European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF) opened an investigation into alleged corruption at Agrofert, one of the firms Babiš controls.
- Issues related to the acceptance and integration of refugee and immigrant communities persisted throughout 2016. Several provocative demonstrations were held, including one at which a Koran was burned.

Executive Summary:

Babiš's ANO won regional elections held in October. The victory, combined with robust polling numbers for the party, suggested that the ANO may see a strong showing in parliamentary elections scheduled for 2017. There was also speculation during the year that Babiš would eventually replace Bohuslav Sobotka – head of the Czech Social Democratic Party (ČSSD), which with the ANO and the Christian Democratic Party (KDU-ČSL) comprised the country's ruling coalition – as prime minister, even in spite of an ongoing investigation by OLAF into practices at Agrofert. Sobotka's ČSSD won elections to the Senate, held in two rounds in October, though its share of seats in the body decreased.

Corruption is a serious problem. A hint of the issue's scale was revealed during the Panama Papers scandal that emerged in April 2016, when a trove of documents was leaked from a Panama-based law firm and unveiled by media organizations. Of the 11 million documents released, over 250,000 had a connection to the Czech Republic, with nearly 300 Czech business figures appearing in the files. Many of the cases involved alleged tax evasion or money laundering.

Anti-immigrant, antirefugee, and anti-Islamic sentiment persists in the Czech Republic. Several provocative protests took place in 2016, some of which appeared to equate Islam with terrorism; at least one featured an organized Koran burning. The events contributed to a growing Islamophobia throughout the country and a chilling effect on the ability of Muslims to practice freely. At least one racially motivated attempted murder against a Muslim person was recorded in 2016.

Babiš and President Miloš Zeman both made public statements during the year that implied a connection between migration and terrorism. In August, Babiš, citing "what has happened in Europe," said he did not want "even a single refugee in the Czech Republic, not even temporarily." In an interview the previous month, Zeman exhorted people to "arm themselves" to guard against the threat of terrorism, and added that he might endorse the construction of a border fence if the country were to see an influx of migrants, which so far it has not. The remarks reflected growing illiberal discourse in the country.

Asylum seekers are routinely detained, and conditions in detention centers are generally poor. In February 2016, an arson attack was committed against a refugee center in Prague, leaving one person injured.


The Romany minority lacks meaningful political representation. None of the parties representing the estimated 250,000 Roma living in the country have reached the 5 percent parliamentary threshold, and Romany candidates lack adequate representation in the major parliamentary parties. Roma face discrimination in the job market and significantly poorer housing conditions, as well as occasional threats and violence from right-wing groups.

Explanatory Note:

This country report has been abridged for *Freedom in the World 2017*. For background information on political rights and civil liberties in the Czech Republic, see [Freedom in the World 2016](#).

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