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## PARTY LEADERS IN THE CZECH POPULIST PARTIES AND MOVEMENTS

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### Abstract

The aim of this article is to analyse the role and importance of leaders in the Czech populist parties and movements, as well as determining significant factors which condition their institutionalisation. The main focus will be placed on the role of leaders in establishing their respective parties, their formal position and intraparty selection processes in VV, ANO, SPD and ÚPD. Examples of actions taken by the leaders of ANO and SPD show that building populist parties on the foundation of the strong, formal and official position of the leader in their party as well as becoming open to more members prove effective when it comes to the discussed issues...

**Keywords:** party leaders, political parties, populism, Czech Republic

## Introduction

The era of populist parties and movements in the Czech Republic started in 2010 when Public Affairs (VV) entered the Chamber of Deputies of the Parliament of the Czech Republic. It was a party which almost perfectly corresponded to the widely used and modern definitions of political populism (Mudde, Kaltwasser 2017). Nevertheless, the success of the party was only relative, with its short career disintegrating quite quickly. It did not participate in the next pre-term parliamentary elections in 2013. Still, its importance exceeds this rather modest and short-lived success. VV became a model for subsequently established populist parties whose success was far greater, that is: ANO, Dawn of Direct Democracy (ÚPD) and Freedom and Direct Democracy (SPD). This model can be under-

stood in a positive as well as negative sense. On the one hand, ANO and SPD partly took over the main ideological and organisational features of VV. On the other hand, they have learnt from the mistakes of this party, unlike VV becoming a stable and relevant and, in the case of ANO, also a fundamental element of the Czech party system.

The term “populist parties” in this article is defined as a party which uses populist slogans. First of all, they claim (to be precise, their leaders claim) that they represent and implement the will of common people and they are opposed to the corrupt elites (Stanley 2008; Kaltwasser, Taggart, Espejo, Ostiguy 2017; Mudde, Kaltwasser, 2013; Mude, Kaltwasser 2017). At the same time, it must be emphasized that this is not a contribution to the debate on defining and perceiving populism through political style, strategy or manner of communication (Caiani, della Porta, 2011; Moffitt, 2016; Barr, 2009; Aalberg, Esser, Reinemann, Strömbäck, de Vreese, 2017). The analysis of views and declarations of political parties’ leaders constitutes a sufficient insight into the matter to decided whether a party is populist or not.

Writing this article was motivated by the growing political importance of such parties and their leaders. The significance of populist parties is increasingly higher and thus they are becoming an object of theoretical and empirical analyses (Stanley 2017; Mudde 2007, 2013; Roberts 2017; Kaltwasser, Mudde, 2014; Andreadis, Stavrakakis, 2017; Jagers, Walgrave, 2007).

Czech political theoreticians who analyse populist business parties in the Czech Republic often base their analyses on the model of *phases of party development* by Robert Harmel and Lars G. Svåsand (1993), which, among other elements, determines the role of the party leader in the process of institutionalisation of a political grouping (Hloušek, Kopeček 2019, Kopeček et al. 2018). This process comprises three stages: identification, organisation and stabilisation. In the first phase, the role of the leader is that of a creator and preacher. The leader should be original and creative, he should have communications skills, charisma and authoritativeness. In the second phase he should be an organiser, which means possessing organisational orientation and skills, consensus building skills and strategic skills. In the third stage, the role of the leader consists of being a stabiliser, which means having personal reputation for credibility and dependability, administrative skills (for organisational maintenance and fine tuning) and complex human relations skills (to lead complex party organisation while dealing with other parties) (Harmel, Svåsand 1993: 75).

This article analyses the position and role of party leaders of ANO, SPD, ÚPD and VV. These parties all have a few important common features: they are typically populist parties and are politically and organisationally dependent on their leaders who come from the business world. The analysed parties, although not identical, correspond to a basic model of a *business firm party* (Hopkin, Paolucci 1999). They originated following the initiative and needs of their leaders as a *personal vehicle*, as defined by Paul Lucardie (2000), and they served, or still serve – as in the case of ANO and SPD – as a means of fulfilling the ambitions and needs of their leaders.

The main research questions to fulfil the aim of the analysis address the following issues: Did leaders play a significant and formal role in establishing the discussed political parties? What are their formal and informal positions in the structure of their parties? Do party leaders inspire trust among voters? Answers to these dilemmas will make it possible to characterise their role and determine how much they contributed to the institutionalisation

sation of their parties. The article combines qualitative content analysis requiring the collection of primary data from party manifestos and desk research for collecting secondary data, such as results of elections from databases.

The first part of the article provides information on the leaders and their political parties. The second part focuses on the analysis of the formal and informal positions of party leaders, primarily through the prism of their powers and effect on their parties. The third part is devoted to the selection process of party leaders. The fourth part, finally, analyses the support for the leader in a non-partisan context, mainly with reference to elections.

### Leaders and their parties: who are they?

Chronologically, the first populist business party was Public Affairs (*Věci veřejné*, VV). Its beginning dates back to 2001, when a Prague-based local initiative of citizens formed. A year later, VV transformed into a political party. It entered national politics in 2008–2009, when it was controlled by businessman Vít Bárta (an owner of a security agency *Agentura Bílého lva*), who led it to its electoral success in 2010. Then, VV entered the Chamber of Deputies of the Czech parliament, winning 10.88% of the votes and 12% of the deputy seats.<sup>1</sup> The party received four ministries and co-created the cabinet of Prime Minister Petr Nečas, while Bárta himself became Minister of Transport (2010–2011). Although Bárta was not the formal founder of VV, it was under his leadership that the party became visible on the Czech political scene. Additionally, Bárta was not the party's formal chairman, yet he determined its political direction and, above of all, he sponsored the party. In the VV's initial period of existence, the party's formal chairman Radek John (2009–2013) in fact implemented Bárta's policy. Bárta himself became the leader in 2013. He considered VV to be his private business, taking control over it in taking control over it with aggressive business-like approaches. He treated VV as support for his business activity (Kopeček et al. 2018: 61). However, conflicts soon arose. In 2012 the party split, while in 2015 it de facto disappeared (Havlík, Hloušek 2014, Hloušek 2012, Kopeček et al. 2018).

Another populist business party, chronologically speaking, is ANO, a movement that was established in May 2012. Its name originated on the basis of the name of a political movement that started a year earlier – Action of Dissatisfied Citizens (*Akce nespokojených občanů*, ANO). Today, the official name of the movement is ANO 2011, yet its commonly used name is shortened to ANO.<sup>2</sup>

The founder, sponsor and unquestioned leader of the movement is Slovak-born Czech billionaire businessman Andrej Babiš, who made a meteoric political career after many years of hovering around the elite of the Czech business milieu.<sup>3</sup> In the 2013 parliamentary elections ANO won 18.65% of the votes, which translated to 23.5% of the seats in parliament.<sup>4</sup> The movement entered the social democrat government of Bohuslav Sobotka, while Babiš became Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance. In the following

1 See <https://www.volby.cz/pls/ps2010/ps> (Access: 12. 02. 2019).

2 The name of the movement can be interpreted as a word game. The Czech „ano” means „yes.” The website of the movement in English translation reads: „Yes, it will be better” ([www.anobudelip.cz](http://www.anobudelip.cz); Access: 13.02.2019).

3 Andrej Babiš is a founder and owner of Agrofert, the biggest Czech agricultural, food production and chemical holding. In 2013 he bought Mafra — the biggest Czech media group. Babiš was the second richest man in the Czech Republic (Kubát 2015: 96).

4 <https://www.volby.cz/pls/ps2013/ps> (Access: 13.02.2019).

parliamentary elections, in 2017, ANO won with 29.64% of votes and 39% of seats.<sup>5</sup> Then, Babiš, as the winner in the elections, became Prime Minister.

Other populist and business-related parties, yet “enriched” with far-right nationalism and xenophobia, are Dawn of Direct Democracy (*Úsvit přímé demokracie*, ÚPD) as well as Freedom and Direct Democracy (*Svoboda a přímá demokracie*, SPD). Both of these movements are closely related with each other, as they have one common founder, financial patron and head – a Czech-Japanese businessman Tomio Okamura.<sup>6</sup> However, this does not mean that both parties are identical.

Okamura started his political career in 2012 when he was elected as Zlín senator in the Czech Senate by-election of the Parliament of the Czech Republic. Encouraged by the success, in May 2013 he founded Tomio Okamura’s Dawn of Direct Democracy. His name was removed from the party title in 2014 and since then the movement has been referred to as Dawn of Direct Democracy. ÚPD was successful in the 2013 Chamber of Deputies elections with 6.88% of the votes and 7% of the seats in the Czech Parliament.<sup>7</sup> Yet, it was soon involved in inner conflicts and in 2015 Okamura left the movement to create a new party, the SPD, while ÚPD disappeared completely in 2018.

The other movement associated with Okamura, officially known as Freedom and Direct Democracy – Tomio Okamura, was established in 2015. Although basic political traits of both movements are the same, Okamura learned from his mistakes and failures and formed the SPD with a different vision organisationally and rhetorically (Kopeček et al. 2018). Okamura established his new movement “just in time,” as the immigrant crisis had flared, mobilizing not only SPD but also the whole populist political scene (Čísař, Navrátil 2019). In the parliamentary elections of 2017, SPD entered the Chamber of Deputies with 10.64% of the votes and 11% of the seats, becoming the fourth most powerful parliamentary party,<sup>8</sup> while Okamura himself became Deputy Speaker of the Chamber of Deputies.

When it comes to the four presented parties, in three cases the role of the leader was critical in establishing and running the party. Only Bárta of the VV did not initially play any formally significant role.

## Position of the party leaders

The level importance from the position of all the presented party leaders is indisputable to party success on a scale which has not been witnessed in the Czech politics since the fall of communism in 1989. It is difficult to imagine the existence of the presented parties without the influence of their current leaders.. This shows well in the case of ÚPD, which went into political oblivion soon after Okamura’s leaving. The position of party leader is conditioned by two factors – formal and informal. The formal factor consists in the organisational structure of the analysed movements which is determined in their statutes. The

5 <https://www.volby.cz/pls/ps2017nss/ps?xjazyk=CZ> (Access: 13.02.2019).

6 Tomio Okamura was born in 1972 in Tokyo, his mother is a Czech from Moravia, his father is Japanese-Korean. Okamura lived for some time (together around 10 years) in Japan, but as a young man of 21 came back to the Czech Republic, where he became a businessman, owning a travel company organising trips for Japanese tourists to the Czech Republic and a specialist shop with Japanese food in Prague. Interestingly, his Japanese origin, his foreign name and surname and visibly Asian appearance clearly do not discourage his supporters, who are nationalists, anti-immigration and xenophobic (Kubát 2015:97).

7 <https://www.volby.cz/pls/ps2013/ps> (Access: 13. 02. 2019).

8 <https://www.volby.cz/pls/ps2017nss/ps?xjazyk=CZ> (Access: 13.02.2019).

informal factor concerns a specific atmosphere or mentality in such parties. Both formal and informal factors are sometimes complimentary and strengthen the position of the leader; however, they can also sometimes be contradictory.

An extreme case of discrepancy between the statute and the real life situation is Public Affairs. This party in fact had two statutes – an official one and an unofficial one. The former was the basis for registering the party in the Czech Ministry of Internal Affairs in order to legalize themselves. The statute did not fundamentally differ from the rules binding in other Czech parties, where the role of the leader was not especially prominent. In 2008–2009, informal leaders of the party appeared, with Vít Bárta as the most important of them. In January 2009, Bárta presented a document called “The VV Ethics Code”<sup>9</sup> which became a new unofficial statute of the party. The code determined the real structure of the party, marginalising its official bodies and elevating the position of the unofficial leadership with Bárta himself in the lead. He became the head of the so-called Concept Council of VV, which was responsible for ruling the party. Interestingly and significantly, the official chairman of the party, Radek John, was not a member of this council. It consisted of Bárta’s friends and close associates (mainly from his firm, ABL) and held meetings at his home (Hloušek 2012: 328–329, Kopeček et al. 2018: 77–78). In this way, Bárta became the *de facto* head of the party whose powers were practically limitless, he was an “owner of a company.” Nonetheless, such a “non-institutionalised” manner of running the party failed to work in the end. The party soon got entangled in inner conflicts. Moreover, the doubled organisational structure did not exert a positive impression on the public. Ultimately, Bárta took charge of the party, yet it was too late, as the party had already suffered infighting and disputes in 2013.

Other populist and business parties did not repeat the above extreme model of discrepancies between official and unofficial variables conditioning the position of the party leader. On the contrary, they tried to combine them in such a way as to strengthen the official position of the leader, that is strengthen it not through negating the role of official organisational structures of the party but with the aid of these structures. It proved most effective in the case of ANO, a movement which has functioned the longest and has experienced the greatest political success among all populist and business-related movements in the Czech Republic. ANO managed to institutionalise and formalise initially rather informal leadership of Andrej Babiš, without limiting his power. Since the very beginning of ANO, Babiš made all the important political, organisational and personal decisions in his party. In 2013–2015, he was full of energy and relied mainly on the employees of his Agrofert holding company. However, he has faced resistance. The greatest conflict occurred in 2013 when he stifled the rebellion of four (out of five) of his deputies who, notably, were not related to Agrofert. Since then, he has surrounded himself only with checked and loyal associates. In 2015, an ANO congress formalised, without debate or resistance, a decision-making process that would not undermine Babiš as party leader.. Additionally, the subsequent congress in 2017 reformed the management structure of the movement, strengthening his position even more.

A 2017 party statute passed which states that the chairman of ANO acts independently in all respects (Art. 9).<sup>10</sup> The chairman is the head of all three executive bodies: the

9 The VV Ethics Code see: [https://www.idnes.cz/zpravy/domaci/navrh-etickeho-kodexu-veci-ve-rejnycch.A110517\\_112345\\_domaci\\_jj](https://www.idnes.cz/zpravy/domaci/navrh-etickeho-kodexu-veci-ve-rejnycch.A110517_112345_domaci_jj) (Access: 14.02.2019).

10 The Statute of ANO see: <https://www.anobudelip.cz/file/edee/2018/stanovy-cistopis.pdf> (Access:



entire organization, the presidium and the committee. ANO's presidium is the most important statutory body of the movement provided with broad competences. Probably its most important competences are deciding the admission or rejection of members of the movement and selecting candidates for all sorts of elections (Art. 12). These decisions must be still confirmed by the committee of the movement, yet the chairman himself is entitled to change its decisions (Art. 12). Such a system is a good example of strengthening the position of the leader through combining formal and informal factors. Babiš previously had a deciding voice in regards to lists of ANO's candidates in elections, yet only informally. The change of party statute in 2017 formally confirmed the already existing practice. Thus the chairman single-handedly decides about candidates in elections, which effectively strengthens not only the chairman's personal position in the movement, but also the discipline and cohesion of the whole movement (including deciding together with the presidium about excluding members).

The unassailable position of Babiš in ANO is conditioned by a number of informal circumstances which are not based on the statute. Financing the movement plays a crucial role. Babiš has financed the establishment of the movement as well as its electoral campaigns. He is the charismatic founding father and the maker of its success (so far, every move he has made has been successful), not only in the view of the movement members, but also among all the other supporters. Naturally, not everyone likes him, as Babiš is a highly controversial politician with a problematic communist and business past. He has been faced with various scandalous affairs (including being charged as a result of proceedings undertaken by the prosecution) and has undergone severe criticism from opponents. All of this has not undermined his position in ANO. On the contrary, it has improved his position. Czech political scientist Lubomír Kopeček (et al. 2018: 121) explains this situation with the so called "bunker mentality", meaning Babiš competently presents himself as a victim of various purposeful campaigns organised by his enemies. Deputies, members and supporters of ANO feel surrounded by enemies attacking their admired, charismatic and effective leader, which unites the movement and strengthens his leadership position.

Okamura managed to consolidate his commanding position at his second attempt at launching a political party. The first attempt failed, but Okamura was able to draw the correct conclusions from the mistakes made by Dawn of Direct Democracy (ÚPD) and did not repeat them in Freedom and Direct Democracy. The statute of ÚPD was written in such a way that all the competences (political, organisational, financial, etc.) were attached to the position of the chairman. He had the function of the spokesperson of the movement, which made it possible for him to interpret steps taken by the movement in his own way irrespectively of anything and anyone. One of the main problems of ÚPD and one of the main causes of its quick collapse was totally limited membership in the movement. It had only nine founding members<sup>11</sup> and did not admit any new members. Consequently, after the parliamentary elections of 2013, only four of the 14 deputies were members of the movement. Non-member deputies did not have any influence on the policy of ÚPD and could not enter the movement because Okamura refused to enlarge the membership base.

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14.02.2019).

11 Apart from Okamura, these were: Georgi Bidenko (businessman), Marek Černoch (airline pilot), Radim Fiala (businessman and politician), Ota Ledvinka (businessman), Jaroslav Novák (journalist), Josef Pisák (lawyer and businessman), Jiří Štětina (doctor and politician), Jan Zilvar (PR and marketing manager). Okamura said that 4 of them are his close friends (Kopeček et al. 2018:165).

Additionally, some financial scandals occurred such as suspicious financial transactions of the movement conducted by its chairman. As a result, the majority of the parliamentary group rebelled against its own political party after it becoming unrecognizable to them in 2015. The rebellion led to the exclusion of the head of the movement from his own parliamentary group. Okamura left ÚPD and established a new grouping – SPD. It is important to note that Okamura was not expelled from the movement, as its undemocratic organisational structure precluded that. He was only removed from the parliamentary group, and he left the movement of his own accord (Kopeček et al. 2018, Kopeček, Svačinová 2015, Kubát 2015).

The above considerations show that limiting access to the party as a method of holding authority-based power proved to be unsuccessful for all presented parties. That is why Okamura's new party embraced a different strategy, even though it still guarantees a dominant position of the leader.<sup>12</sup> An important role is played here also by formal and informal factors. The former include the statute of the movement which grants the leader enormous power (as they become the only statutory body of the movement) and addresses the leader as the spokesman of the movement (Art. 6).<sup>13</sup> Yet these are informal factors that are more significant, as they grant a dictator-like position to the chairman of SPD. They include primarily the loyalty of Okamura's associates. Okamura has surrounded himself with trusted associates, first of all those who remained loyal to him during the mutiny in ÚPD in 2015. The next effective methods of strengthening his position were efficient PR measures. Okamura is the only face of SPD, constantly monopolising all propaganda campaigns of the movement, primarily on the Internet (mainly on Facebook). It is only Okamura who is identified as the face of the movement by its supporters, voters and the whole of society (Kopeček et al. 2018).

### Selection of the party leaders

The method of selecting and electing leaders of the Czech populist parties is not so important, as their election is a sheer formality. The self-proclaimed leader of Public Affairs, Vít Bárta, was not elected by anyone. The formal chairman of the party was elected in direct Internet elections by party members and by registered supporters of the party, the so-called "Vs" (*Věčkaři*). The election of the chairman in such a manner was additionally confirmed by the National Conference (Hloušek 2012, Kopeček et al. 2018).

The leader of ANO, now Andrej Babiš, is elected by ANO's congress every two years. Babiš was first elected during the founding congress in August 2012. The next election took place during the first "regular" congress in March 2013, then in March 2015, February 2017 and February 2019. What draws one's attention to ANO's leadership selection are the election results. Babiš has never had any opponent. In 2012 he won 73 out of 76 votes of the delegates; in 2013, he won 169 out of 172 votes; in 2015, he won 186 out of 187 (the

12 Unlike ÚPD, SPD admits new members and builds regional structures, yet it is not easy to become a member of the movement. Those interested first become „candidates to membership” for 2 years (sic!). Only then they are likely to become full members of SPD on the basis of the presidium's decision (Art. 3 of the Statute). The Statute of SPD see: <https://www.spd.cz/uploads/stranky/6/dokumenty/stanovy-16-8-23016.pdf> (Access 15.02.2019).

13 Ibidem.

one ballot was invalid, which means no one voted against him); in 2017, he won 195 out of 210 votes; and in 2019, he won 206 out of 238 votes.<sup>14</sup>

The formality of electing Okamura to his own parties' leadership position is best illustrated with the fact that his surname was/is part of the name of both of his political parties. In the case of ÚPD, the election of the head of the movement was pure fiction. The procedure was not determined in the statute, apart from one detail: that the chairman's term in office lasts five years (much longer compared to other Czech parties). The chairman was a one-person body. Formally, the members of all the bodies of the movement were elected by the highest body – the Conference, which comprised all the members of the movement (thus not its delegates). In order to be elected, one had to win three-fourths of the votes of the electors (again, members of the whole movement). The fictitious nature of democracy in the movement was strengthened further by the fact that officially the first members of ÚPD are only the members of the founding committee. The movement did not build any regional structures, and the procedure to accept “non-first” members was not determined in the statute at all. Thus it was virtually impossible to join ÚPD, which had only nine members, as previously mentioned. At the same time, the statute stated that the conference was comprised not of delegates, but of members of the movement itself. This means that the ÚPD chairman was theoretically elected by the majority of three-fourths of the members of the nine-member conference (with more than half of them present). This practically meant that the movement represented a quasi-chieftain system which was, in any case, undemocratic (Kubát 2015: 90–91).<sup>15</sup>

SPD approached the problem of selecting its chairman more moderately and conventionally. The term in office lasts only three years, and the chairman is elected by the national conference which is formally the highest body in the party. In order to be elected a person has to win three-fourths of votes of all the conference members.<sup>16</sup> The first regular electoral conference of SPD took place in July 2018. Okamura did not have any opponent in these elections and won 150 out of 152 votes.<sup>17</sup>

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14 [https://www.idnes.cz/zpravy/domaci/babis-v-cele-noveho-politickeho-hnuti.A120801\\_125833\\_domaci\\_hv](https://www.idnes.cz/zpravy/domaci/babis-v-cele-noveho-politickeho-hnuti.A120801_125833_domaci_hv) (Access: 15. 02. 2019), <https://zpravy.aktualne.cz/domaci/politika/babise-znovu-zvolili-predsedou-hnuti-ano-2011/r~i:article:772897/> (Access: 15.02.2019), [https://www.idnes.cz/zpravy/domaci/babise-volili-vsichni-do-sirsiho-vedeni-ano-se-dostal-i-stropnický.A150228\\_131443\\_domaci\\_kop](https://www.idnes.cz/zpravy/domaci/babise-volili-vsichni-do-sirsiho-vedeni-ano-se-dostal-i-stropnický.A150228_131443_domaci_kop) (Access: 15. 02. 2019), <https://domaci.ihned.cz/c1-65637940-zive-hnuti-ano-na-snemu-voli-vedeni-babis-nemasouper> (Access: 15. 02. 2019), <https://www.novinky.cz/domaci/497562-ano-znovu-zvolilo-babise-predsedou-sto-procent-tentokrat-nemel.html> (Access 17.02.2019).

15 It is also worth mentioning here that this is against the Czech Law on Political Parties and Movements, which in Art. 4(b) states that parties and movements whose statutes are undemocratic and which do not have democratically elected party bodies cannot come into being. See: <https://www.psp.cz/docs/laws/1991/424.html> (Access 14.02.2019).

16 The statute states that the national conference comprises all the movement members. However, if there are more than 200 members, the system of delegates is employed (Art. 6). The Statute of SPD, see: <https://www.spd.cz/uploads/stranky/6/dokumenty/stanovy-16-8-23016.pdf> (Access: 15.02.2019). Since the very beginning SPD had had more than 200 members, so the chairman is elected by the conference delegates, and not by the movement's members.

17 <https://www.spd.cz/uploads/stranky/6/dokumenty/zapis-ze-zasedani-5-celostatni-konference-hnuti-spd.pdf> (Access: 15.02.2019).



## Position of the party leaders outside their parties<sup>18</sup>

The key role of leaders of populist parties “inside” their parties or movements ought to logically translate into the social or electoral sphere. They are the trademark of their parties, which means they should catch the attention of potential voters. In other words, it is the leadership who should be one of the main reasons voters choose their parties. The latest studies of electoral behaviours in the Czech Republic show that affinity and attachment to the leader are noticeable variables which influence the behaviour of voters of populist and business parties.

Affinity to the leader is the most important in the case of Okamura. When it comes to both of his parties, ÚPD and SPD, Okamura’s likeability influenced the choices of the voters and clearly encouraged them to vote for his parties. Considering the first organisation, Okamura ÚPD, the affinity of the voters was complemented with the feeling of alienation towards the whole political system, while corruption was seen as the most important political problem of the country. In the second case of SPD, additionally, there was Euroscepticism and a feeling of threat engendered by immigrants. Okamura skilfully used all these social attitudes and was able to convince voters to support him voters on supporting him and his party. Studies of transfers of electoral preferences between the 2013 and 2017 elections showed that the political style represented by Okamura in 2017 interested many voters who had not participated in the previous 2013 election (Kopeček et al. 2018: 238).

In the case of ANO, voters’ affinity to Babiš also played an important role. While Okamura’s voters are to a certain degree typical voters of parties of protest, ANO voters belong to the electoral mainstream. This means that they are sensitive to the effectiveness of the movement (and its leader) and their possible displeasure at the political and economic situation in the country considerably lowers ANO’s chances in elections. This also works the other way round – optimism concerning the political situation in the country and the belief that ANO and its leader are able to deal with problems perceived by voters as urgent increase the electoral chances of the movement (Havlík, Voda 2018, Kopeček et al. 2018).

Thus, affinity and attachment to Babiš and Okamura have a positive effect on the electoral position of their parties. However, this does not mean that one can claim that these politicians enjoy some extraordinary popularity in the whole of Czech society. On the contrary, the results of regular studies of trust towards politicians conducted by the Czech Public Opinion Research Centre (CVVM)<sup>19</sup> show that Babiš is the most trusted politician, yet this trust is still quite low and in the last three years distrust towards him dominates over trust. In turn, Okamura is a politician with the highest level of distrust in the Czech Republic. (See Table 1)

A certain, although rather not representative, indicator of voters’ affinity to the leaders of the discussed parties are the so called preferential votes. Members of the Chamber of Deputies are elected from party lists on the basis of the order established by the given parties. However, voters can grant their preferential votes to (maximally) four candidates whom they prefer over others for whatever reason. If a candidate gains a number of preferential votes which correspond to at least 5% of all ballots cast for “their” party in a given

18 In this part of the article we do not deal with VV, because this party participated in only one election (2010), thus there are not data which would make it possible to comparatively determine evolution of electoral behaviours of its supporters.

19 <https://cvvm.soc.cas.cz/cz/tiskove-zpravy/politicke>

constituency, then they gain priority over other candidates (Chytilek et al. 2009: 313). This way, a candidate placed low on the list can “jump over” candidates who are higher on the list, which happens relatively often. Voters do not always understand the aim of such a solution and frequently grant their preferential votes to candidates who are first on the list, i.e. those who cannot “jump over” anyone. Then there is no sense behind such a system of preferential votes, yet it can still be used as an indicator of popularity of particular politicians, or at least it is widely commented upon in the media after each parliamentary election.

**Table 1.** Trust/distrust: Andrej Babiš and Tomio Okamura (%)

	I/2015	IV/2015	V/2015	IX/2015	X/2015	I/2016	III/2016	VI/2016	IX/2016	X/2016	II/2017	IV/2017	IX/2017	I/2018	II/2018	V/2018	IX/2018	XI/2018	XII/2018
<b>Andrej Babiš</b>																			
Trust	59	54	55	53	50	51	47	42	46	49	46	43	37	37	42	35	40	40	38
distrust	33	39	40	40	45	42	46	51	46	43	48	49	56	56	50	58	53	55	55
<b>Tomio Okamura</b>																			
trust	34	24	24	30	28	29	33	31	29	–	35	–	39	33	–	28	–	31	26
distrust	56	64	66	57	60	59	53	56	59	–	53	–	49	58	–	62	–	60	65

Source: <https://cvvm.soc.cas.cz/cz/tiskove-zpravy/politicke>

Comparing election results from 2013 and 2017, we can see that the popularity of Babiš and Okamura has increased. Babiš is the lead, with 18,955 preferential votes in 2013, which placed him then at the sixth position in the number of such votes (with Karel Schwarzenberg receiving 37,794 votes). Okamura received 8,661 preferential votes (which gave him the seventeenth place).<sup>20</sup> In 2017, Babiš dominated the elections, receiving by far the greatest number of preferential votes: 48,645. Václav Klaus Jr., who came second, received not even half as many preferential votes – 22,635). Okamura received 12,689 preferential votes (which placed him at the eleventh place).<sup>21</sup>

## Conclusion

Addressing the main aim of the current analysis, that is determining the role of the presented leaders, one may ask whether the leaders of the Czech populist business parties have successfully dealt with challenges of institutionalisation of their parties and whether they use similar strategies of managing their groupings. Bárta seems to be the least effective here. As a creator and speaker, he might have gone through the phase of identification with his party, yet he was not a good organiser and stabiliser. It proved detrimental when leadership was split into formal, in fact fictitious, and unofficial groups – a real leading position. This was a step impossible to understand and confused members of the party and its voters, as well as politicians from other parties. His other political mistakes led

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.volby.cz/pls/ps2013/ps111?xjazyk=CZ&xkraj=0&xstrana=0&xv=2&xt=3> (Access: 17. 02. 2019).

<sup>21</sup> <https://www.volby.cz/pls/ps2017nss/ps111?xjazyk=CZ&xkraj=0&xstrana=0&xv=2&xt=3> (Access: 17. 02. 2019).

to internal conflicts (Hloušek, Kopeček 2019: 51–53, Kopeček et al. 2018: 249–245). The political adventure of VV soon came to an end, yet Bárta showed the way for other political businessmen who noticed that there was demand for such a type of politics in Czech society. They saw that could break into the Czech political scene and become successful if they avoided Bárta's mistakes.

Despite initial mistakes, Tomio Okamura proved to be a much cleverer political businessman. Unlike Bárta, he was capable of learning from his own mistakes and at the second attempt he managed to create a stable political movement. Okamura was a great creator and preacher, who has the skill of attracting masses of far-right supporters and voters. The failure of his first movement consisted primarily in total closure of ÚPD. This became the main (although not the only) source of conflicts which led to mutiny against Okamura and his expulsion from the movement. Significantly, without its charismatic leader, ÚPD failed to spark interest among voters and soon disintegrated. Okamura had a chance to reprise his role as a creator and preacher establishing a new party – SPD. Unlike ÚPD, SPD was open to new members, with the leader still occupying a very strong leading position (almost chieftain-like). His movement has not been functioning long enough (since 2015) to be able to determine if Okamura will prove to be a good organiser and stabiliser in the long run (Kopeček et al. 2018: 249).

The greatest success is that of Andrej Babiš and his ANO. He proved to be not only a successful creator and preacher, but also organiser and most probably also stabiliser. He was able to fully institutionalise and conduct routinisation of his party. ANO became an organisationally consolidated political party under total control of its leader. Its political success was spectacular as in the course of a few years it became a dominant mainstream political party in the Czech Republic. On the other hand, this success may prove to be risky in the future, as ANO and its leader may become victims of changing political preferences, depending on the political and economic condition of the country. In other words, maintaining a strong position in the future depends on whether Babiš will be able to meet excessive expectations of his voters, whom he populistically promised recovery of the country, not only economically but also politically and morally.

Summarising, it can be said that the populist leaders of business parties in the Czech Republic have attempted to occupy a similar unanimously strong position in their parties – starting from the leading role in establishing their parties, through a very strong formal position in their structures. In this process, their victories in partisan elections for a chairman also had their significance, although they were quite predictable. Comparing all the presented parties when it comes to the issues of interest in this article, it can be concluded that their effectiveness depended on a strong but formal and official position of the leader in his party, as well as opening the parties to welcome a wider group of members (ANO and SPD).

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