

FREEDOM AND DIRECT DEMOCRACY (SVOBODA A PŘÍMÁ DEMOKRACIE, SPD)

IMPACT: Freedom and Direct Democracy (Svoboda a přímá demokracie, or SPD) is a far-right political party in the Czech Republic that was established in 2015. Founded as an anti-elitist and anti-Muslim populist party, SPD cooperates with other far-right and anti-Muslim European political parties and is a member of the Identity and Democracy (I&D) group in the European Parliament.

- **Established in June 2015 by Tomio Okamura and Radim Fiala, Freedom and Direct Democracy (SPD) is a far-right political party in Czechia (the Czech Republic) with a long track record of inflammatory statements, actions, and policies that target Muslims and Islam.** The party is generally characterized as a far-right, anti-migrant, and anti-EU party. **Although Muslims comprise less than an estimated 1 percent of Czechia's population, anti-Muslim attitudes are wide-spread. According to March 2018 polling data, 58 percent of respondents did not want a Muslim as a neighbor (compared to 20 percent in 1991).** SPD is only one of several Czech social movements and political parties that employ anti-Muslim rhetoric and anti-Muslim positions.
- **Prior to founding SPD, Okamura established the political party Dawn of Direct Democracy (Úsvit – Národní koalice, or “Dawn”),** which existed from June 2013 to March 2018. Dawn was a populist, anti-elitist, and anti-EU party. **When Dawn's popularity began to decline, Okamura in June 2015 founded SPD as a new split-off party.**
- **Dawn, the precursor to SPD, worked in coalition with other anti-Muslim parties in Czechia.** In August 2015, Dawn entered into an agreement with the **far-right, anti-Muslim coalition movement Bloc against Islam “for the purpose of a joint candidate for the 2016 Senate and regional elections.”** Less than a year later, in April 2016, the **“We Don't Want Islam in the Czech Republic” movement (Islám v České republice nechceme) ended a cooperation with Dawn for the regional and Senate elections in autumn 2016.** The movement “We Don't Want Islam in the Czech Republic” is led by Martin Konvička who according to reporting in Romea, **“proposed [Muslims] be ground into bone meal or gassed to death” in concentration camps.** Konvička failed to form a coalition with the name *Úsvit s Blok proti islámu* (Dawn with Bloc against Islam), which was refused by the Ministry of the Interior.
- When SPD participated for the first time in the 2017 Czech parliamentary election for the Chamber of Deputies (Lower House), the party won twenty-two seats with 10.6 percent of votes. In the September 2019 European Parliament election, SPD won two out of twenty-one seats with 9.1 percent of votes. **In the European Parliament, SPD is part of the far-right and anti-Muslim Identity and Democracy (I&D) group, which is dominated by Marine Le Pen's National Rally (Rassemblement National) and Italy's League (Lega).**
- The SPD party's political platform supports a referendum to withdraw from the European Union. According to SPD, this “project of current European integration” includes **“the controlled Islamization [islamizací] of Europe,”** which it describes as **“ongoing illegal immigration”** and **“the initial phase of the conflict”** that **“will ultimately threaten freedom, democracy and the very existence of the Czech Republic and our nation.”** SPD's platform also states, **“We consistently reject the multicultural ideology that is the tool of Islamization.”** SPD has also employed racist rhetoric against what it describes as the “Africanization” (afrikanizací) of Europe. An SPD blog post titled **“The Islamized Africanized West”** quotes a June 2020 Facebook post by SPD co-founder Radim Fiala: “Let us defend our sovereign homeland and Christian Central Europe!”
- Okamura and SPD party members have a record of anti-Muslim actions and rhetoric. According to analysis by political scientist Selma Muhič Dizdarevič, **Okamura marched in**

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January 2015 along with 400 people to **protest against Islam** in Prague's Old Town Square. The protest was organized by the group **"We Do Not Want Islam in the Czech Republic."** Okamura has directly advocated actions targeting and stigmatizing Muslim businesses and houses of worship. **In June 2015, he endorsed a post on Facebook by his deputy that suggested that Czechs should boycott Muslim-owned businesses or should "provoke" Muslims by walking pigs in the vicinity of mosques.**

- **Politicians from the SPD have also targeted and called for violence against other marginalized communities in the Czech Republic.** SPD Secretary Jaroslav Staník in November 2017 reportedly stated, while in Parliament and inebriated, that **"Jews, homosexuals and [Roma] should be gassed" and shot at birth, for which he was reported and eventually charged with hate speech.** In November 2017, Okamura became vice-chair of the Chamber of Deputies of the Parliament of the Czech Republic. After his party won in the 2017 parliamentary elections he said, **"We want to stop any Islamisation of the Czech Republic, we push for zero tolerance of migration."** In November 2017, the head of the Catholic Church in the Czech Republic, Cardinal Dominik Duka, congratulated Okamura on SPD's electoral success. In February 2018, **Okamura was heavily criticized for downplaying the Nazi concentration camp in Lety that imprisoned over 1,300 Roma people during WWII—only 326 of whom reportedly survived imprisonment.** In June 2013, Okamura called for all Roma to be deported from Czech Republic.
- **In the 2018 elections SPD's platform focused largely on Islam, with a campaign slogan of, "No to Islam, No to Terrorists." SPD also campaigned for the legal ban of Islam in Czechia.** While Islam is a recognized religion in the Czech Republic, **Muslims are not extended the same privileges as other religious communities**, including the right to establish schools, to hold legally recognized weddings, and to conduct religious ceremonies in public spaces. **Okamura has claimed that Islam is not a religion but an "ideology."** In December 2018, SPD MP Jiří Kobza stated that, **"We have suggested that all ideologies that promote hatred and violence should be banned. One of the ideologies is Islam. And then we have fascism and Nazism." Kobza also claimed that Muslim migration to Czechia is "colonisation."**
- In October 2017, **Okamura posted a video titled "Islam as Hitler's Nazism" ("Islám jako hitlerovský nacismus") on his website.** A citizen complaint filed with the Highest Administrative Court argued that SPD slogans such as "No to Islam" and "Stop Islam" were "unrealistic" and "breach constitutional principles." The complaint was ultimately rejected with the explanation that, "a common strategy ["in political marketing"] is personalization, hyperbolization, symbolism or abbreviation of slogans, especially during the election campaign." **When asked about his inflammatory, anti-immigration rhetoric and the fact that Okamura himself is an immigrant to Czechia, Okamura "insists that [his statements are] perfectly 'normal.'"**
- In December 2017, **SPD organized a meeting of representatives of several European far-right, anti-Muslim political parties in Prague, including Dutch leader of the anti-Muslim Freedom Party, Geert Wilders, and the leader of the French National Rally, Marine Le Pen.** Okamura, Wilders, and Le Pen congratulated the far-right, anti-Muslim Freedom Party of Austria (Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs) under the leadership of Heinz-Christian Strache for forming what they described as an "historic" government coalition with the New Austrian People's Party (*Neue Österreichische Volkspartei*) under Sebastian Kurz. In October 2017, Le Pen endorsed Okamura ahead of the 2017 Czech parliamentary election. In April 2019, **Okamura hosted another meeting in Prague, attended by Le Pen and Wilders, to rally ahead of the European Parliament elections for their Europe of Nations and Freedom (ENF) coalition.** ENF was dissolved shortly thereafter in June 2019,

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replaced by the Identity and Democracy (I&D) coalition. Far-right leader of the Italian League (*Lega*) and then-Interior Minister Matteo Salvini participated with a video message.

- According to scholar Dizdarevič, **SPD has inspired violence against Muslims**. In 2017, an elderly Czech man reportedly chopped down trees on two separate occasions to block a railway line. Before committing these actions, he **disseminated flyers in which he pretended to be a “jihadist” planning attacks on Czech citizens**. The same man **called a local representative of SPD, saying he was willing to “go after migrants,” who in his view were “spreading through Europe like worms”**—a phone call that was confirmed by the member of SPD. The man was sentenced to four years in prison.
- According to the 2017 Annual Report on Extremism by the Czech Ministry of Interior, SPD is not by its own definition an “extremist entity.” However, the Ministry stated in its report, **“In some cases the statements by SPD representatives are even more radical than the statements by representatives of extremist parties on the right as traditionally understood,”** and that SPD **“had an unequivocal impact on the domestic extremist scene.”**

Bridge Initiative Factsheet