

ANDREJ BABIŠ

IMPACT: Andrej Babiš has served as prime minister of the Czech Republic since 2017 and is the founder and leader of the Action of Dissatisfied Citizens party (ANO 2011). Babiš has furthered anti-refugee rhetoric and argued in favor of a “zero refugees” policy. Prior to entering politics, Babiš founded multinational conglomerate Agrofert. Babiš has strong political and business links to notoriously anti-Muslim Czech President Miloš Zeman.

- Andrej Babiš is a billionaire businessman and current prime minister of the Czech Republic. **From 2011 to 2013 and in 2020, he was ranked on Forbes’ World’s Richest People List. In 1993, he established the multi-industry conglomerate Agrofert, which operates more than 230 subsidiaries in industries from agriculture and renewable energy to food and media.** Under pressure “to separate his businesses from his public role” and to comply with a Czech conflict-of-interest law, he placed Agrofert in trust in 2017. Currently, his wife Monika Babišová oversees the Agrofert Foundation. In 2013 Babiš acquired Mafra publishing house, one of the most prominent media companies in the Czech Republic and publisher of two of the largest Czech newspapers, Mladá fronta DNES and Lidové noviny, the oldest newspaper in the country.
- In fall 2011, Andrej Babiš founded the ANO 2011 association, which he turned into a populist political party in May 2012. **ANO, which means “yes” in Czech and is an acronym for Action of Dissatisfied Citizens, was conceptualized as a movement in opposition to the governing political elite. In 2019 Forbes labeled Babiš the “Czech Donald Trump.”** During his visit to the White House, he echoed Trump’s nationalist slogan, proclaiming, “I have a similar plan to make the Czech Republic great again.” *Foreign Policy* has called Babiš “Babisconi,” a portmanteau of his surname and the surname of former Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi, the subject of numerous political and financial scandals.
- Between 2013 and 2017, Babiš’ ANO progressed from the second to the largest bloc after joining a coalition in 2013 with the social democrats and the Christian democrats. Babiš became finance minister in 2014, a post he occupied until he was ousted in May 2017 to put “an end to a government crisis that threatened to shatter the ruling coalition government.” ANO later formed a minority government in 2017 with the Communist party after it was rejected by the anti-Islam and far-right party SPD and failed to form a coalition.
- In the 2014 European Parliament elections, ANO 2011 gained 16.3 percent of votes and four seats, becoming the largest bloc. **The party was part of the Alliance for Liberals and Democrats in Europe (ALDE) group, which aims to “strengthen the Liberal Democrat movement in the EU and throughout Europe.”** In 2019, ANO 2011 became the largest bloc in the European Parliament elections, receiving six seats and 21.18 percent of votes. During these elections, the party joined Renew Europe, the successor to ALDE.
- Babiš’ business relationship with anti-Muslim politician and current President Miloš Zeman goes back to Zeman’s tenure as prime minister. In 2001, Zeman oversaw the sale of Unipetrol, a state-owned chemical company, to Babiš. Polish media reported substantial bribery, a claim denied by Babiš. **Zeman is known for his anti-Muslim statements in a country with several anti-Muslim**

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movements and an estimated Muslim minority of five thousand to twenty thousand people out of ten million total inhabitants. According to reporting in Al Jazeera, “Islam is recognised as a religion in the Czech Republic, but its followers are restricted from several basic privileges enjoyed by other faiths, including the right to establish schools, to hold legally recognised weddings and conduct religious ceremonies in public spaces.” **Due to growing anti-Muslim sentiment and feelings of estrangement, some opt to leave the country.**

- **Babiš uses less explicit anti-Muslim discourse, often conflating Muslims with Syrian refugees who came to Europe in large numbers after the civil war broke out.** As such, he has held a zero refugee policy towards Muslims from war-torn countries. In July 2016 during his term as Deputy Prime Minister for the Economy and Minister of Finance, Babiš said: “From the beginning, I say that refugees should stay in hotspots outside Europe in Turkey on the border in Syria, but outside the war. So that after the war they could return to Syria and not go to Europe. **When you see today that more developed countries, with a different tradition of accepting migrants, are not able to integrate immigrants from the Middle East and Africa, you should not be surprised that I do not agree with the reception of any refugees.**” The Migration Policy Institute notes that “Czechs tend to overestimate the numbers of migrants and refugees in the country (often as much as three times higher than reality), in part because of incomplete or biased information presented in the media.”
- **In December 2017, Babiš claimed that there was no place for even a single refugee in Czechia:** “We have no obligation, and I don't think we can accept anyone at all at this time. The responsibility of politicians is first and foremost to guarantee the security of our citizens and only then to consider possible solidarity with refugees.” Babiš gave this remark as a reaction to the debate on relocation quotas in the European Union and how to find rules to distribute refugees. **According to reporting in the Guardian, Babiš’ “election campaign was marked by vows to resist the EU’s proposed quota system to distribute refugees and other migrants more fairly throughout member states ... [and] it chimes with rising anti-Islamic sentiment in the Czech Republic.”**
- **In September 2018, Babiš reiterated his stance that immigration is a cultural threat, making use of stereotypes of immigrants as violent and dangerous.** Consequently, the Babiš-led government has offered no resettlement for any refugee within the EU program. According to an article in *Sputnik International*, Babiš stated: “**We [in the Czech Republic] take illegal migration as a threat to the European civilization’ ... ‘We don’t want to live [in our home] like people live in Africa or the Middle East. We must stop [immigration from Muslim states].** If Frenchmen, the Dutch or Belgians want to obtain [more Daesh* supporters] than they have today, it’s up to them.”
- In January 2018, he declared that, “**We have to fight for what our ancestors built here. If there will be more Muslims than Belgians in Brussels, that’s their problem. I don’t want that here. They won’t be telling us who should live here.**” Babiš often criticizes Western European countries for accepting too many Muslims, which he claims creates social problems, arguing: “Europe and especially Germany are experiencing an identity crisis.” Babiš said that he backed Zeman’s second presidential campaign due to his policies against illegal immigration and Islamic terrorism.

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- On June 3, 2019, Babiš met in Prague with Burmese State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi to discuss economic cooperation, education, and health development. **Although Suu Kyi has been celebrated as a human rights icon, she has received criticism for her silence on the genocide of Myanmar’s Muslim population. Babiš praised her efforts to democratize Myanmar.** When Suu Kyi met Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán a few days later, a press statement read: “The two leaders highlighted that one of the greatest challenges at present for both countries and their respective regions—south-east Asia and Europe—is migration.”

Bridge Initiative Factsheet