

MILOŠ ZEMAN

IMPACT: Miloš Zeman is the president of the Czech Republic and one of the most outspoken anti-Muslim politicians in the country. Previously, he served as prime minister from 1998 to 2002 and was a member of the Czech Social Democratic Party (*Česká strana sociálně demokratická, ČSSD*) until 2007. In October 2009, Zeman founded his own party, the Party of Civic Rights, Zemanovci (*Strana Práv Občanů - Zemanovci, SPOZ*), which supported the anti-Muslim party Freedom and Direct Democracy (*Svoboda a přímá demokracie*).

- Born in 1944, Miloš Zeman joined the Czechoslovak Social Democracy (ČSSD) in 1992 soon after the Velvet Revolution in 1989 against the Soviet-style communist regime. **From 1993 to 2001, he served as the chairman of the ČSSD and transformed it into one of the country's major parties. In 1998, Zeman became prime minister of a minority government.** He was not successful as the ČSSD's presidential candidate in 2003 and in 2007 left the party. **In October 2009, he founded a new party, the Party of Civic Rights, Zemanovci (Strana Práv Občanů - Zemanovci, SPOZ), which he chaired from March 2010 to May 2010.** The party did not win any seats in the 2010, 2013, or 2017 legislative elections. In the 2016 regional elections, SPOZ participated in a coalition with Tomio Okamura's Freedom and Direct Democracy party (*Svoboda a přímá demokracie*, or SPD) and won sixteen seats. **Zeman won the Czech presidential elections twice, in 2013 and in 2018 for a second term as candidate of his own Party of Civic Rights.**
- In the last several years, various Czech anti-Muslim movements have been active in organizing rallies against the construction of mosques and virtually disseminating anti-Muslim conspiracy theories. With Zeman's support, an anti-Muslim association called Bloc Against Islam (Blok proti Islamu) attempted to establish a political party in coalition with another party for the 2016 regional elections. **In November 2015, Zeman addressed an anti-Muslim demonstration in Prague organized by Bloc Against Islam.** During his remarks at the demonstration, which marked the anniversary of the 1989 Velvet Revolution, **Zeman implied that Muslim migrants were distinct from previous migrants to Czechia, who he described as "completely compatible with European values" and "not a culture of murderers and religious hatred."** Zeman further claimed that "the vast majority" of Muslim migrants to Czechia, who he described as "illegal migrants," are "young, well-fed men." Zeman asked why "these men" are "not fighting for their country against Islamic State?"
- **Zeman's participation was met with criticism from politicians, academics and students. The leader of Bloc Against Islam is prominent anti-Muslim activist Martin Konvička, who was charged in November 2015 with inciting hatred against Muslims for remarks he posted on Facebook that called for violence.** These included statements about sending Muslims to concentration camps, promising to grind Muslims into a meat and bone meal after winning the elections, calling Islam a "freak show," "bad," and "ugly," and claims that Muslims lie when interpreting the Quran. Czech Prime Minister Bohuslav Sobotka of ČSSD has described Konvička's Bloc as a "xenophobic sect."
- **Zeman has a long record of anti-Muslim statements. During an international conference in June 2011, Zeman said, referring to Islam: "The enemy is the anti-civilisation spreading from North Africa to Indonesia. Two billion people live in it and it is financed partly from oil sales and partly from drug sales."** Zeman has also stated: **"In a few years, they became Nazis, even fanatic Nazis. And the radicalisation of the - till these times - moderate Muslim population might be like the case of the German population. It might be easier than the German population, [because] you have a very radical ideology based on a religion."** In a 2016 televised interview, Zeman claimed, **"The experience of western European countries which have ghettos and excluded localities shows that the integration of the Muslim community is practically impossible."**
- **During a December 2015 Christmas address, Zeman referred to the influx of refugees as an "invasion."** He said, "I am profoundly convinced that we are facing an organised invasion and not a spontaneous movement of refugees." **Zeman rejected the European Union's system of quotas for refugee resettlement from primarily Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan.** Zeman represents the vast majority of Czechs with this opinion—according to surveys nearly 70 percent of Czechs oppose the arrival of migrants and refugees in their country and only 14 percent accept Muslim immigrants. In November 2016, Zeman said, "If European countries accept a wave of migrants, there will be terrorist groups among them, of which also a Libyan minister has warned. By accepting the migrants, we strongly facilitate Islamic State's expansion to Europe." **As reported in Prague Post, Zeman offered support for the Facebook group We Do not Want Islam in the Czech Republic, stating, "Me, too, I do not want Islam in the Czech Republic."**

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- **During the October 2016 Rhodes Forum, Zeman proposed that all refugees be transferred from Europe to “empty spaces in northern Africa,” or to “uninhabited Greek islands”** as a form of exchange for repayment of Greece’s foreign debt. In the same interview, Zeman said that he is against “Islamic immigration,” claiming it is incompatible with European culture and particularly when it comes to attitudes to women: “I am not against migrants in my country from Ukraine, Vietnam, Russia, Belarussia, Serbia, and so on. **I am only against Islamic migration, because I think there is full incompatibility of culture — as one example only, the attitude of Islamic migrants to women. Completely different from European culture.**” Zeman further compared himself to a figure in Greek mythology **said to be cursed with the gift of prophecies that would never be believed: “You remember the fate of Cassandra? She warned against the horse in Troy. She was right.”** According to reporting on Zeman’s remarks by *Financial Times*, Zeman also “warned of a ‘strong connection’ between the migrant influx and the ‘wave of jihadis’ in Europe, arguing that moderate Muslims could be radicalised by extremists among them, as Germans were by the Nazis in the 1930s.”
- **Zeman propagates anti-Muslim conspiracy theories about the Muslim Brotherhood.** In a January 2016 interview with Czech radio, Zeman described the mass migration of Muslim refugees to Europe as an “invasion,” stating, **“I believe that the invasion is organised by the Muslim Brotherhood and is financially supported by a number of states.”** In 2015, according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM), an “unprecedented” one million refugees from predominantly Syria, Afghanistan, and Iraq fled to Europe from war, persecution, and poverty. **Zeman also claimed that Egypt’s Muslim Brotherhood wanted to “gradually control Europe.”**
- In May 2015, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), an international organization consisting of fifty-seven member states, criticized Zeman for his remarks in May 2014, in which he **stated that “Islamic ideology rather than individual groups of fundamentalists was behind violent actions similar to the gun attack at the Jewish Museum in Brussels.”** In its eighth OIC Observatory Report on Islamophobia, “[T]he OIC Secretary General expressed disappointment, underlining the Czech President’s statements on Islam were in line with his statements in the past, when he linked believers in the Quran with antisemitic and racist Nazis. The Secretary General declared that such statements [...] also ignore the historical facts that antisemitism and Nazism were European phenomena through and through, while they had no roots in Islam, neither as a religion nor as a history or civilisation; and that President Zeman’s statements were nothing more than misinformed stereotyping and Islamophobic.”
- According to October 2015 reporting in *Prague Post*, Zeman claimed that “Islamic refugees will not respect Czech laws and habits, they will apply sharia law, so unfaithful women will be stoned to death and thieves will have their hand cut off.” **He also made misogynistic remarks about Muslim women, stating, “We will be deprived of the women’s beauty since they will be shrouded in burkas from head to toe, including the face” and “Well, I can imagine women for whom it would mean an improvement, but there are few of them and I cannot see any such here.”**
- During an October 2017 meeting of the Visegrad countries (Hungary, Poland, Czechia, and Slovakia), Zeman stated that “radical Islam, which is funded by Saudi Arabia, is spreading throughout Bosnia and Herzegovina” and that “ISIS black flags are already flying in several towns.” The Bosniak member of the tripartite presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bakir Izetbegovic, rejected Zeman’s statement as xenophobic, Islamophobic, and baseless.
- **In 2017, a new populist and anti-refugee party, ANO (which means yes in Czech) won the elections, and its leader, the millionaire Andrej Babiš, supported Zeman vocally.** According to scholar Selma Muhic Dizdarevic, “out of the first six parties that gained most votes only one could be considered neutral to favourable when it comes to issues such as refugee quotas and generally a more tolerant approach to diversity in society.”
- **According to October 2015 reporting in Prague Post, Zeman responded to criticism of his many anti-Muslim views that “the Islamophobia for which he was criticized was opposition to Islamic radicalism.”** In September 2017, a press conference presented a statement against xenophobia that openly criticized Czech President Zeman and political parties. The signatories wrote that the “dissemination of hostility against visible minorities is gradually becoming one of the important topics of the political competition for votes in the run-up to the October elections.”

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- Zeman is also criticized for his connections to Russia. In 2010, Czech lobbyists Miroslav Šlouf and Martin Nejedlý, representatives of the Russian oil company Lukoil in the Czech Republic, were the main donors to Zeman's Party of Civic Rights, which was denied by Zeman. According to deputy director of the European Values Think Tank, Jakub Janda, at least one-third of his campaign funding came from undeclared donors in his 2018 reelection. Zeman denied Russian sponsorship.
- In op-ed by Jakub Janda in the *Washington Post* described Zeman as "Europe's Trumpiest president."
Following the election of Donald Trump in 2016, Zeman said regarding Trump: "I agree with his opinion on migration and the fight against Islamic terrorism." According to reporting in Politico, Zeman was the only head of state in Europe who supported Donald Trump as a candidate in the 2016 US presidential elections.

Bridge Initiative Factsheet