

COALITION AGREEMENT OF THE PARTIES "SPOLU"⁽¹⁾ AND "PIRSTAN" 2021

ANALYSIS FOR NEON

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There is not much to reproach when it comes to the **value anchoring** of the coalition agreement. Although it is a standard entrée for political documents, the core values are represented and presented in the own, probably shared language of all 5 coalition parties. As for the preamble, a bit populist "ruthless irresponsibility" of the previous government is blatant, but the effort to "heal the wounds" and revive not only finances and economies, but also the "people's trust in the state and its institutions" deserve a support and to be remembered.

What and how **is pushed ahead**, will depend on the staffing, the politics of the individual parties, the maintenance of the announced spirit of coalition cooperation and the further development of the world around them. Fourteen of the priority areas of the program correspond to the existing ministries (18 ministers will complete the ministerial posts for science and research, EU and legislation in addition to the prime minister) and digitization is the fifteenth priority agenda.

The big political topics of the forthcoming years should be apart from digitization, closely linked to public administration reform, covid (actually just before the parentheses) and increase of prices, or debts, among other things, pension reforms and housing, security strategies, the state energy concept, revision of the framework educational programs or amendments to the Construction Act and Service Act, the Social Services Act and the protection of agricultural land.

A range of these priorities appear in the coalition program **cross-sectionally**. From the point of view of NeoN, cross-references in various areas to local resources and thriftiness, repeated emphasis on social sensitivity to vulnerable groups, including further resolving of executions, various forms and areas of education, support for small and medium-sized actors and a tougher attitude towards multinational companies in terms of taxes, in case of agricultural subsidies or in European regulation of on-line platforms.

(1) SPOLU is a political coalition of ODS (Civic Democratic Party), KDU-ČSL (Christian and Democratic Union – Czechoslovak People's Party) and TOP09. PIRSTAN is a political coalition of Pirate Party and STAN (Mayors and Independents).

Most chapters are complemented by a generally constructive relationship to relevant **EU** agendas (with the exception of a strong stance on illegal migration and reservations about certain aspects of the Green Deal) and a commitment to a "professionally and responsibly prepared" Czech EU presidency in the second half of 2022. Nevertheless, generally, you can feel from the coalition agreement in addition to more honest preparation of the Czech positions, the old approach based on the primary interest in funds, the internal market and the free movement of people without ambition for an original contribution or a more systematic shift of other agendas.

The coalition program often mentions the need for **long-term** solutions or concepts: for public finances, pension reform, transport infrastructure, foster care, security forces, research excellence, forest policy, farm participation in processing and food trade or for "long-term sustainable digitalization". The benefits of the EU presidency should be long-term as well (however, unlike in 2009, the presidential country is now primarily a mediator).

However, only a small part of the cross-sectional or long-term priorities also offer a specific **cross-cutting approach** to their solution. There are 3 exceptions that deserve our attention: explicit calls for closer cooperation between the Ministry of the Environment, the Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of Industry and Trade in the field of green transformation, coordination of regional policy across ministries and a commitment to better coherence of national policies in order to meet SDGs (Sustainable Development Goals).

A quality state will ensure the democracy

In terms of NeoN's main agendas, the new government program offers democracy protection, a clearer shift towards environmental and social sustainability, including ongoing gradual education reform. The range of agendas that are or may be closer to consensual shift has thus extended in comparison with the previous governments. However, the cultural division of society is reflected in the different attitudes towards the first and second generation of human rights as well as in the partial solutions of other agendas.

It is possible to believe in a clearly **pro-democratic**, pro-Western (albeit with more sympathy for transatlantic cooperation than the EU) rhetoric based on reflection of populist politics.

A welcome turnaround is taking place around the **public service media** too. In a separate section of the chapter on culture, which is drawn up also promisingly, the coalition declares its interest in their freedom and transparency. It will focus on the sustainability of their funding, involving the Senate in the system of electing the Council of Czech Television (ČT), Czech Radio (ČRo) and Czech News Agency (ČTK) and their management will be subject to control by the Supreme Audit Office (SAO). In several places, it also

touches on access to **disinformation**, including support for European regulation and the development of various literacies - civic and ethical education, financial and media literacy, critical thinking.

A significant proportion of specific measures for a better quality of the **state and political culture** (greater independence of the Attorney General, conflict of interest act, extension of SAO powers, reform of the Office for the Protection of Competition, whistleblowing, transparency of public procurements, etc.) perhaps shows that the coalition understands the conditionality of democracy for a good functioning of the state for as many citizens as possible.

The coalition wants to reform the **public administration** by establishing an expert workplace, stocktaking, mainly by unifying and simplifying of agendas, revising the Civil Service Act, recruiting top experts, measuring performance and a strong central authority in the field of ICT for management and digitization control.

With all the emphasis on modernization and innovation of the state, the chapter on **education** continues mainly in the gradual reforms of the previous government (or Minister Plaga): more funding, support for directors, teachers and support staff, reduction of overall curriculum volume, emphasis on quality and key competencies. However, the new government could be distinguished on one hand by the necessary emphasis on non-formal and lifelong learning, the elimination of regional disparities and the support of various disadvantaged pupils, and on the other by the conservative emphasis on examinations (as opposed to making an effort to other types of assessment during lockdowns).

Divided human rights

The coalition will "apply a conservative approach to the Constitution of the Czech Republic and the Charter of Fundamental Rights and Freedoms". **Human rights** rhetoric is much stronger externally (return to "Havel's" foreign policy) than inward and it visibly prefers civil and political human rights (1st generation - the struggle with non-democratic regimes and against extremism) especially over cultural rights (2nd generation - more equal pay, LGBT, protection of ethnic minorities). Even in the central vision for the EU, the coalition calls for a democratic, non-bureaucratic, trade-open union, with an emphasis on respect for civil liberties".

Although the future government does not reflect much on its weak social mandate (as opposed to a secured parliamentary mandate), it realizes that it is taking over "a country scarred and divided by unnecessary strifes", and declares the need for greater consensus, at least on large reforms. It tries to offer at least a few solutions to **bridge the gap** between poor and rich, healthy

and sick, regions (regional policy, Eurofunds, education, green transformation, etc.) or generations (pension reform), but it mentions a number of ditches only marginally, reluctantly or not at all.

In the social area, under the motto "responsible solidarity for all who cannot help themselves", it deals in detail with various social services, but the declared need for social sensitivity is certainly not repeated as strongly on every topic where it is appropriate. Inequalities are spoken only in the context of education, as far as social policy is concerned, the government focuses on the support of families and households, children, people with disabilities (it is preparing a law on social entrepreneurship). The other groups are then summarized unaddressed under the term "vulnerable groups".

The consistently "non-gender" vocabulary ("needs of single parent families") underlines the absence of references to women, let alone **gender equality**. Although interesting support for various types of care (not only for children or the elderly, but also, for example, care for family carers, parental allowance for grandparents, or also from a NGO perspective practical support of part-time work and increase of limits on Contract of Services and Contract for Work) represent a strong line across the program, the key emphasis is placed on the family. An important commitment to combating sexual and domestic violence ignores prevention and assistance to the disabled and does not refer to any EU agenda. Women's rights are mentioned only in the chapter on health care in connection with the choice of care provider.

The protection of minority rights is mentioned only in the preamble. The coalition wants to support the registered "partners" vaguely by "adjusting the legal conditions". With the exception of support for children with different mother tongues and otherwise disadvantaged children, other rights are practically not mentioned there. The treaty is completely silent, especially on the rights of racial, religious or national minorities - even on Roma issues. We cannot expect liberal politics in this area – this is underlined by the coalition's strong stance against mandatory quotas in migration, a mantra on its prevention in places of its origin and along migration lines and an effort to address this growing global problem by "supporting pro-migration camps outside the EU".

Invisible and marginal service of non-profit organizations

The references to civil society as such, especially its organized parts - the non-profit sector - are similarly weak and unconvincing. In the preamble, the government states that it wants to be in a "regular dialogue with civil society", the coalition agreement does not contain any unifying elements and vocabulary, let alone the concept or key topics for NGOs. The non-profit sector explicitly calls for cooperation to digitalize the state and eliminate "unnecessary and duplicative obligations" and to promote a healthy lifestyle. It

relies on it in social services, though without mentioning the non-profit nature of most providers. In the chapter on security, the coalition wants to introduce a bit bizarre "systematic preparation of citizens and associations for crisis situations" with echo in the chapter on defense.

Apart from healthcare (mental health centers) or firefighters, in some rather marginal contexts it also mentions **several specific non-governmental organizations**: the coalition will "support all leisure organizations (Skaut, Sokol, Orel, etc.) and similar civic society activities", "hunters, beekeepers, associations, etc., to plant trees and establish landscape elements "and the chapter outlines the planned campaign for the selection of a" Czech national bird "with the Czech Ornithological Society.

From the NeoN priority topics in the **Strategy for cooperation with NGOs 2021-2030**, the program only slightly touches upon participation and public funding. Although the treaty operates with a term "a citizen" in many contexts, it is primarily a passive entity - a consumer of state services. Greater **involvement of citizens** or the public is mentioned only in the amendment to the Construction Act. Although steps to increase transparency (such as on-line monitoring of the government's implementation of its program) should help the work of NGOs. Although it mentions a **multi-annual financing** as a general objective also specifically, but only for priority sectors: social services, health care and research and scientific institutions.

The coalition pays considerable attention to better use of **European funds**: especially the Recovery Fund, the Just Transition Fund, the Social and Cohesion Funds (transport) and the Modernization Fund is explicitly referred to in several places (education, energy and the environment). However, the document lacks even a hint of a reflection on the state's chronic problems: among others insufficiently negotiated and implemented national strategies, non-representative and non-transparent ways of managing and controlling Eurofunds.

A more consistent and comprehensive view of sustainability

Whereas a cultural transformation is also a point on which both Czech society and politics is having a different standpoint, both socio-economic cohesion and green (and digital) transformation with the new government seem to confirm their shift to **more consensual positions** (although again a stronger pressure can be expected from the opposition). In principle, already the need to move to a clean, low-carbon and circular economy that is nature-friendly and to its resources (and people) is no longer called into question. Although significant disputes persist also within the coalition (about the energy mix, electromobility, compensation, etc.), the political issue for the entire government (not only the Ministry of Environment) is definitely not "why" but "how" (although this has been similar also in education policy, for almost 10 years.

The government's **energy** vision is based on a combination of nuclear (including small reactors), Renewable energy sources (RES) (with "rooftop" photovoltaic rehabilitation) and energy efficiency. It does not contradict the Green Deal, but it wants to negotiate with the EU to take into account the social impacts and specifics of the Czech Republic. It supports carbon duty, it holds coal limits and it wants a diversion before 2038 in exchange for recognizing nuclear for emission-free and natural gas as a transitional resource in EU taxonomy.

Agriculture is one of the chapters where you can feel the breeze of fresh, for the Czech standards up even progressive wind, because "The Czech Republic will be bio". The agricultural policy is supposed to effectively link "economic, environmental and social goals in our country" from the beginning - to capping on subsidies for large companies, conditionality of subsidies to the environment and animals and simplification of their administration, up to 2030 ¼ of land to the organic farming regime and at least 1/10 for the protection of biodiversity, terminate the support for 1st generation biofuels and reduction of soil blocks.

The coalition itself describes **environmental policy** as liberal-conservative. It sees Green Deal as an opportunity to "modernize the Czech economy, increase the quality of life and improve the environment". Water protection is moving to the level of national interest, but new reservoirs (including the Elbe-Odra-Danube project) have to be stopped again. Soil protection should take precedence over the construction of production and logistics centers (but no longer over the interests of other developers). And a circular economy that is supposed not only to reduce several impacts is becoming a common concept.

Cooperation across strifes towards a stronger recognition of non-profit and democracy

The coalition program of the new government is thus an expected mix **of more conservative and less liberal** steps, which takes place in a slightly different form in each of the NeoN priority areas as well as in each of the 15 priority areas of the future government. **NGO platforms and coalitions** will vis-à-vis the government each be in a slightly different situation in terms of possible ambitions for changes in their agendas, the accessibility of politicians and officials, and most likely also the possibility of public financial support.

More space is opening up for networks and organizations that are seeking greater transparency, quality and, in particular, the digitalization of public administration, as well as for activities aimed at promoting democracy in foreign policy (in case of transformation policy probably more than development cooperation), agricultural reform, environmental protection and inclusion in education. Otherwise, there is probably no fundamental change for education. Conversely, human rights platforms aiming at a more equal conditions for women, LGBT or ethnic minorities are unlikely to make much progress and are likely to use other tactics for their purposes. Respecting **mutual differences in attitudes to topics and working methods**, maintaining solidarity (especially in access to all human rights) and interconnection between our networks can now be more difficult than in the past 4 years with sharper and more common front line.

The common priority of NeoN - democratic and civic space should not be significantly threatened in the coming period also due to the weakening of extremist and populist parties. On the other hand, the new government is still far from more **conceptual support for the non-profit sector**, as defined by the Strategy of Cooperation with NGO 2021-2030, approved by the previous government: better perception, participation, and funding of non-profit organizations (including umbrella organisations and platforms). And additional collective efforts will be needed not only to anchor measures in the various departments, but also to explain the need for a different culture of work and cooperation.

The question remains whether the coalition agreement offers a new space for **constructive cooperation** between the new government and wider civil society (with more significant but not exclusive role of NGO networks) on longer-term solutions to common cross-cutting issues, such as the quality of public administration, disinformation, housing, just transformation, agricultural reform or even more comprehensive and ambitious implementation of the sustainable development strategy 2030) not only in the domestic but also in the European and international context.

With the good will (and the necessary resources and capacities) to heal quarrels and to strengthen confidence in the state everywhere with an honest effort the interconnected non-profit networks could now not only have a greater positive impact on society, but also gain organically stronger **recognition and standing in the eyes** of officials, politicians and the more skeptical public. We have time until the next elections, in which to citizens (whether volatile voters or unprecedentedly not represented millions) quite possibly not only the government but also the non-profit elite will be accountable.

COALITION PRIORITIES

1. Stabilization of public finances

Our country needs a responsible budgetary policy that curbs a pointless wasting of money of taxpayers, finds savings and **sets the long-term direction of public finances**, and ensures the prudent management of the state as soon as possible. The path to stability lies in the reform of state spending, **measures against conflicts of interest and corruption**, and the efficient use of money, not in increasing the tax burden.

2. Orientation to EU and NATO

The Czech Republic must be an **active member of the European Union and NATO**, defending the interests of its citizens. Foreign policy will have an unquestionable **Euro-Atlantic orientation**, an emphasis on a stable partnership with democracies around the world and on the protection of human rights and democracy. We consider membership in the European Union to be key and beneficial for the Czech Republic, and we are ready to successfully **host the presidency of the Council of the EU** in the second half of 2022.

3. Pension reform

They are the people who create the prosperity of our country. Therefore, everyone deserves to know that he is financially secure when he is old. We will prepare a reform that reflects merit and also promotes intergenerational solidarity in families as well. The reform of the pension system will be built on **society-wide consensus**, which will ensure a long-term perspective.

4. Education

The future of our country depends on the education of our children and the lifelong learning of all of us. The education system must use the potential of quality teachers; create space for the **development** of knowledge, skills and **competencies** of pupils and students, and all of that in modern content and environment. The education system must be able to **help the weakest** as well as to support talents.

5. Regional cohesion

The **increasing differences between regions** of our country are a major societal challenge. The place where a person lives must not affect the quality of education, the availability of health care or connectivity so fundamentally. The government will avoid the further expansion of the gap between the regions and address the problems that lead to the depopulation of the countryside and borders.

6. Promoting the free market

Supporting small and medium-sized enterprises and targeting investment subsidies and subventions to real needs are the way to ensure the prosperity of our country. We will support creative and innovative approaches with the potential for growth and healthy competition. Support from public finances must not go about increasing the profits and influence of large companies

7. Environment

Climate changes are indisputable. This government is committed to find solutions that will reduce human impact on climate change. We will look for realistic solutions that will really **help protect the environment, water, air, soil, forests and the landscape**. And all of that knowing the responsibility for a prosperity of our country.

8. Family and housing

The stability of families is important for the development of our society. We will help families cope with the challenges they face. We will support more flexible working conditions, offer greater opportunities to **bring family and professional life** into harmony, and provide affordable health care. We will simplify the lives of all those who work honestly, and at the same time, we will offer **targeted help to those who cannot help themselves**.

We do not turn a blind eye to the problems that the people of our country have. And housing has been one of them lately. We will put forward solutions that will help both proprietary and rented housing, including **social housing**. Currently, the most important thing is a fundamental acceleration of **construction proceedings** while maintaining the protection of other interests and a support of local governments.

9. Digitalization

The unification and digitalization of state processes are the way to a friendlier, more efficient and cheaper state administration. We will teach the state to work effectively using all modern technologies. Digitalization is not only a way for more comfortable contact of citizens with the state, but the automation of processes will also lead to a **more efficient functioning of the state as such**. **There will remain a paper way** for seniors and people with special needs.

10. Science and research

Our country is full of educated, talented and innovative people. Our science and research have had a great reputation in the world for a long time. Science and research will have unquestionable support, because we see them as an opportunity to move the Czech Republic even higher among the most successful countries. We will **ensure a functional cooperation between the state administration** and high-quality academic institutions from the Czech Republic and abroad, which will enable to **transfer current knowledge into law-making**.

11. Modern state administration

Public administration must be modern, lean and flexible. We will prepare it for the challenges of the 21st century, we will bring the best talents to it in order to provide top services to citizens. We will make sure that officials **make more use of data and make it accessible**, and that their work will **always have a citizen at its center**.

12. Responsibility to voters and political culture

We will push for an improvement in political culture. We will select honest, competent and trustworthy personalities who will defend the interests of the Czech Republic and will not **be in a conflict of interests**. We will set up more predictable meetings of the Chamber of Deputies. We will arrange for citizens to see how the government is implementing the agenda on the Internet. We will work constructively with each other and with the opposition as well.



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