

The Germans as a threat to 'us'? The use of history and othering of Germans in the speeches of the Czech President Miloš Zeman

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Abstract

The text contributes to discussion on political populism and creation of 'the Others' through populist strategies. 'The Others' in whose opposition the Czech nation has been defining itself for at least last two centuries are mainly the Germans. This study focuses on the Czech President Miloš Zeman who can serve as an example of a populist, and raises the following question: Does Zeman populistically create a construct of Germany and the Germans as 'the Others' and a source of threat to the Czech people? In such case, does he do so based on historical references or based on references to current German politics? The analysis is designed as a CAQDAS of the empirical corpus consisting of all Zeman's text production. The analysis shows that although Zeman perceives Germany historically as a source of threat to the Czech people, he pays his attention mainly to the activities of modern Germany, above all to the immigration policy of Angela Merkel. In this regard, Zeman's rhetoric is strictly populist. The analysis points out the discursive power of the topic of Islam and migration, and their effect on politics in a country with almost no Muslims and migrants.

Key words

Populism; othering; Miloš Zeman; Germany; Sudeten Germans; use of history

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Introduction

The text, whose main subject is the idea of a threat posed by Germany presented in the speeches of the Czech President Miloš Zeman, contributes to a discussion on political populism that has become one of the most important debates within current comparative political science. Academics from around the world increasingly use the concept of populism to characterize numerous phenomena in modern politics.¹ Current political science seems to be almost contaminated by the topic of populism – however, in many texts, there is a serious deficiency lying in the use of the ‘populist’ label without providing empirical evidence and argumentation.² Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser³ point out that the problem of numerous studies is the lack of following up previous comparative research and, above all, authors’ reluctance to leave the comfort zone of their field, respectively the insufficient effort to link the study of populism with the study of other subjects. The presented text follows up this remark and links the concept of populism with the interest in the instrumental use of history as a political tool.

Miloš Zeman is one of the most visible figures of the Czech post-communist politics and he has gone through number of posts during his political career – he was the Speaker of the Chamber of Deputies, the Prime Minister, and in 2013 after several years of being retired from politics, he became the first President elected in a newly introduced direct election. Then in 2018, he retained his mandate and entered the office for the second term. Already in the first term, Miloš Zeman operated with three fundamental principles of populism within his rhetoric – *the people*, *the elite* and *the others*.

In this paper, the concept of populism relates to the issue of instrumental use of history. History, conveniently grasped and interpreted, is a tool exploitable for legitimizing current political steps and political claims for the future.⁴ Disputes about history interpretation are a natural part of political struggle. What is easily exploitable are, among others, the images of ‘historical enemies’, or those who are perceived as ‘the others’ in the past or present politics. As such, they have a place in collective memory.⁵ In the process of othering, it is also possible to use various historical (real or imaginary) injustices⁶ and conflicts. The principle of othering, thus determining the groups that are not part of the nation/people, or the ‘them-and-us’ mentality,⁷ is, according to many authors, an integral part of

¹ Cas Mudde, and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser, “Studying Populism in Comparative Perspective: Reflections on the Contemporary and Future Research Agenda,” *Comparative Political Studies* 51, no. 13 (2018): 1667–93, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414018789490>.

² Kirk A. Hawkins, “Is Chávez Populist? Measuring Populist Discourse in Comparative perspective,” *Comparative Political Studies* 30, no. 4 (2009): 1040–1067, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414009331721>.

³ Mudde, and Rovira Kaltwasser, “Studying Populism”.

⁴ E.g. Simone Benazzo, “Not All the Past Needs to Be Used: Features of Fidesz’s Politics of Memory,” *Journal of Nationalism, Memory & Language Politics* 11, no. 2 (2017): 198–221, <https://doi.org/10.1515/jnmlp-2017-0009>.

⁵ Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory (Heritage of Sociology)* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

⁶ It is a principle similar to the one elaborated by the *grievance theory* that operates with electoral support and mobilization based on grievances and injustices perceived by the society. This theory mostly works with the influence the new injustices have on current politics – grievances can be connected with the effects of changes of economy, increase of migration, or the perception of corruption (e.g. Elisabeth Ivarsflaten, “What Unites Right-Wing Populists in Western Europe? Re-Examining Grievance Mobilization Models in Seven Successful Cases,” *Comparative Political Studies* 41, no. 1 (2008): 3–23, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414006294168>). The principle used in this article is similar, only the injustice is understood as historical and unable to be atoned or undone with an act of justice, however, the mobilization consisting in a threat of history repeating itself could be a functioning strategy today.

⁷ Alan Knight, “Populism and Neo-populism in Latin America, Especially Mexico,” *Journal of Latin American Studies* 30, no. 2 (1998): 223–48.

populism.⁸ The study turns the attention of the populism research to whether, and eventually how, the historical references play a role in the process of populist othering.

As I show in one of the following sections, in the Czech context, the Germans are considered one of the main examples of ‘the others’ and historical enemies. The presented text intends to answer this question: In his speeches, does Miloš Zeman populistically create a construct of Germany and the Germans as ‘the Others’ and a source of threat to the Czech people? In such case, does he do so based on historical references or based on references to current German politics? The study is designed as a content analysis of every speech of Miloš Zeman made during his first presidential term (2013–2018). The text follows on from the existing tradition of analysing populism within the speeches of individual political actors and from the discussion on the place of othering in populist politics, empirically it partially follows up previous studies of various aspects of Zeman’s populist actions.⁹ Even though the Czech president does not dispose of extensive executive powers unlike a president in a presidential system,¹⁰ he accounts for a relevant subject of academic interest, especially considering his ability to influence public opinion and the actors of political power (and also to create an image of the country outwards) through his speeches.¹¹

Populism, Czech politics and Miloš Zeman

Populism and ‘the Others’

Populism belongs to the most frequent terms of current comparative political science and is widely discussed both in theory and in numerous empirical studies. At the same time, there is no clear consensus on what the essence of populism is. Various authors present populism as a ‘thin-centered’ ideology,¹² a style,¹³ a frame,¹⁴ or a discourse.¹⁵ Since the aim of this text is not to contribute to relevant conceptual discussion, it is sufficient to note that in most cases, the essence of populism lies in creating the manichaeist division into ‘the pure people’ and ‘the corrupt elite’, claiming the sovereignty of people and applying the common will, for example through institutes of direct democracy. Although the content of the term ‘people’ is often not clearly explained and serves as a

⁸ Gabriela Lazaridis, and Giovanna Campani, ed., *Understanding the Populist Shift. Othering in a Europe in crisis* (London and New York: Routledge, 2017).

⁹ Vladimír Naxera, and Petr Krčál, “‘This is a Controlled Invasion’: The Czech President Miloš Zeman’s Populist Perception of Islam and Immigration as Security Threats,” *Journal of Nationalism, Memory & Language Politics* 12, no. 2 (2017): 192–215, <https://doi.org/10.2478/jnmlp-2018-0008>; Vladimír Naxera, and Petr Krčál, “‘You can’t corrupt eight million voters’: corruption as a topic in Miloš Zeman’s populist strategy,” *Studies of Transition States and Societies* 11, no. 1 (2019): 3–18.

¹⁰ Michal Kubát, and Miloš Brunclík, *Semi-presidentialism, Parliamentarism and Presidents: Presidential Politics in Central Europe* (Routledge, 2018).

¹¹ Miloš Gregor, and Alena Macková, “Euro-scepticism the Czech way: An analysis of Václav Klaus’ Speeches,” *European Journal of Communication* 30, no. 4 (2015): 404–17, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0267323115582148>.

¹² Cas Mudde, “The Populist Zeitgeist,” *Government and Opposition* 39, no. 4 (2004): 541–563, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1477-7053.2004.00135.x>.

¹³ Benjamin Moffitt, *The global rise of populism: Performance, political style, and representation* (Redwood City: Stanford University Press, 2016).

¹⁴ Paris Aslanidis, “Is populism an ideology? A refutation and a new perspective,” *Political Studies* 64, no. 1 (2016): 88–104, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9248.12224>.

¹⁵ Yannis Stravakakis, and Giorgios Katsambekis, “Left-wing populism in the European periphery: The case of SYRIZA,” *Journal of Political Ideologies* 19, no. 2 (2015): 119–42, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13569317.2014.909266>.

classic *empty signifier*,¹⁶ it is frequently linked to the term ‘nation’, which applies mainly to right-wing populism.¹⁷

Populism has three significant variables – the people, the elite, and the others. As Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser¹⁸ point out, creating an image of the others is linked only to extreme-right populism, not populism itself.¹⁹ Yet in the case of extreme-right parties, othering results from their nativism. However, populism and nativism are two different things.²⁰ Populism refers to a moral clash between ‘the pure people’ (the good ones) and ‘the corrupt elite’ (the bad ones), nativism is related to ethnic division into insiders (natives) and outsiders (aliens). The fuse of populism and nativism creates the image of ‘the pure people’ as the natives, whereas the (native) establishment is corrupt because it supports invaders and foreign influences that harm the good people. It is also often argued that the business elite financially exploits the immigrants, and their presence harms the people.²¹ Extreme-right parties use the nativist rhetoric to criticize immigration and a populist rhetoric to criticize the politicians who do not prevent immigration or who even support it. On the other hand, it is necessary to say that several recent studies have found a connection between the success of populist parties in general (not only extreme-right populist parties) and the cultural backlash.²² Creating ‘the others’ can be perceived as an accompaniment of populism without distinguishing right-wing and left-wing orientations.²³ Recently, populist othering has been associated mainly with the matter of Islam and the *migration wave* to Europe, which is related to a phenomenon called *new xenophobia*²⁴ that is clearly directed to Muslims. The stigma is not connected to ethnicity or nationality, but to religion, and the defence of the West against the Muslims has become, to some extent, an ideological frame of current populists.²⁵

Should we set aside the animosity toward Muslims, or more generally toward all newcomers, many other studies show that the members of long-time settled communities (the Roma, the Jews) are also perceived as ‘the others’,²⁶ or ‘the others’ are not understood in an ethnic sense – they simply contain anyone who is not, for different reasons, perceived as the member of ‘the people’ (populists’ concept of the people is highly exclusive) – this may include homosexuals, adversaries of a populist politician,

¹⁶ Ernesto Laclau, *On Populist Reason* (London: Verso, 2005).

¹⁷ Mudde, “The Populist Zeitgeist”.

¹⁸ Mudde, and Rovira Kaltwasser, “Studying”.

¹⁹ As an example of an unambiguously populist actor that does not work with the concept of ‘the others’, they mention the Greek Syriza.

²⁰ Cas Mudde, *The Populist Radical Right in Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

²¹ Mudde, and Rovira Kaltwasser, “Studying,” 1677.

²² Ronald Inglehart, and Pippa Norris, “Trump, Brexit, and the rise of populism: Economic have-nots and cultural backlash,” *HKS Working Paper No. RWP16-026*.

²³ Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser add that, even though they do not see creating of ‘the others’ as a defining feature of populism, the cultural backlash argument is not irrelevant for the study of populism. After all, cultural difference between the people and the elite is also one of the accompaniments of populism. Cultural backlash and its study ought to be bound with the issue of populism, more than nativism – they give an example of the distinction between the ‘authentic pure low culture of the people’ and the ‘unauthentic high culture of the corrupt elite’ (see Mudde, and Rovira Kaltwasser, “Studying,” 1678.).

²⁴ Tabish Khair, *The New Xenophobia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

²⁵ Koen Vossen, “Populism in the Netherlands after Fortuyn: Rita Verdonk and Geert Wilders Compared,” *Perspectives on European Politics and Society* 11, no. 1 (2010): 22–38, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15705850903553521>.

²⁶ Lenka Bustikova, “Revenge of the radical right,” *Comparative Political Studies* 47 (2014): 1738–65, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414013516069>.

the corrupt elite, non-profit organizations, or in another way defined enemies of the people, for example foreign elites (Angela Merkel) and transnational elites, both political ('Brussels') and economic (George Soros).²⁷ Populism simply needs to define the enemy – the 'them-and-us' mentality is after all one of the key principles of populism.

Miloš Zeman has been one of the most interesting figures of the Czech politics throughout the whole post-communist development. At the beginning of the 90's, he built his career around the Czech Social Democratic Party and soon became their leader. After being the Speaker of the Chamber of Deputies of the Czech Parliament, he became the Prime Minister for the years 1998-2002. After an unsuccessful run for president in 2003, he retreated from politics and returned after almost ten years as a non-party candidate for the first direct presidential election in 2013 in which he prevailed and won in the second round after a radical campaign.²⁸ Among other things, Zeman owes the success to his reputation of an excellent speaker and a resolute style of politics that considerably polarizes the Czech society. The polarization is caused, among other aspects, by many scandals of Zeman and his circle and by many cases of actions that Zeman himself characterized as a "creative way of interpreting the constitution" and that effectively entail an extremely loose interpretation and misuse of presidential powers and responsibilities set by the constitution.²⁹ What is seen as problematic by a large part of the society is Zeman's cooperation with populist and extremist parties of both left and right end of the spectrum³⁰ within domestic politics, and with dictators and undemocratic regimes (mainly China and Russia) within foreign affairs.³¹ Despite a long-term membership in Social Democracy, Zeman's presidential mandate relates to rather strong xenophobia (nativism), authoritarianism and populism, ergo, with principles that Cas Mudde³² classified as traits of the extreme right. For the purposes of this text, the question of populism is especially interesting. On the other hand, this text is not concerned about whether Miloš Zeman is or is not a populist. In accordance with many other authors,³³ I decided not to evaluate the 'populistness' of a politician, but the 'populistness' of their statements. This is one of the reasons the proposed analysis is based on the empirical corpus consisting of Zeman's text production.

'The others' and the use of history in modern Czech politics

Within inconsistently conceived national histories and often colliding collective memories, 'the others' are irreplaceable – various actors who are not only perceived as national outsiders, but are viewed as (historical, current or timeless) national enemies. The image of national enemies tends to be related to

²⁷ Atilla Antal, "The Political Theories, Preconditions and Dangers of the Governing Populism in Hungary," *Czech Political Science Review* 24, no. 1 (2017): 5–20, <https://doi.org/10.5817/PC2017-1-5>.

²⁸ Pavel Maškarinec, "Prostorová analýza prezidentských voleb v České republice v roce 2013," *Sociológia* 45, no. 5 (2013): 435–69.

²⁹ Jan Wintr, Marek Antoš, and Jan Kysela, "Direct Election of the President and its Constitutional and Political Consequences," *Acta Politologica* 8, no. 2 (2016): 145–63.

³⁰ Vladimír Naxera, "The Never-ending Story: Czech Governments, Corruption and Populist Anti-Corruption Rhetoric (2010–2018)," *Politics in Central Europe* 14, no. 3 (2018): 31–54, <https://doi.org/10.2478/pce-2018-0017>.

³¹ Lubomír Kopeček, *Miloš Zeman. Příběh talentovaného pragmatika* (Brno: Barrister & Principal, 2017).

³² Cas Mudde, *The Populist Radical Right in Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

³³ Matthij Rooduijn, Sarah L. de Lange, and Wouter van der Brug, "A populist Zeitgeist? Programmatic contagion of populist parties in Western Europe," *Party Politics* 20, no. 4 (2014): 563–75, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354068811436065>.

events and phenomena that are often understood as a national trauma³⁴ or a dark age – possibly a genocide, military defeat, occupation, etc. A number of these references related to history are exploitable within current politics.

Given the way how the Czech nation constituted itself during the 19th century, the Germans are naturally the most important ‘others’. From the beginning of the 16th century, the Czech lands were part of the Habsburg Monarchy and the modern process of national revival was led mostly against German cultural, political and economic supremacy.³⁵ The perception of a German as an enemy remained to some extent not only after the establishment of Czechoslovakia in 1918, but also long after the collapse of the communist regime in 1989, while it was fuelled by events such as the Munich Agreement and the loss of the Sudetenland in 1938 or the occupation and the period of the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia in 1939–1945. As Ladislav Holy³⁶ points out, for a large part of the Czech society, a German does not relate to the image of a scientist or a philosopher, but rather to the image of an aggressor, oppressor and warlord. For that reason, in relation to the changes in the foreign policy and economic directions of the Czech Republic in the 90’s and in relation to the German capital entering the Czech milieu, many people started to assume that when Germany did not succeed at conquering the Czechs militarily, they will do so economically. Similar negative references to the influence Germany has on the Czech Republic have lasted until today and can be illustrated, for instance, with a Facebook status of Lubomír Volný, one of the Deputies of the extreme-right and populist party Freedom and Direct Democracy, who, at the beginning of 2019, wrote the following: “By accepting the (?) Euro, the Czech Republic would confirm the German victory in the Second World War.” Currently, there are voices coming from the nationalist scene speaking against Germany not only in relation to economic supremacy, but also against the notion of Germany dominating the European Union, supporting the immigration into Europe, etc.

Germany and the Germans are often a reference point of an own nationalist perception of the Czech state and nation as an active historical entity whose natural development was interrupted by several discontinuities that, however, can be undone.³⁷ These discontinuities are usually associated with the German influence. First of them is the Battle at the White Mountain (1620) that ended the hopes of the anti-Habsburg Bohemian Revolt with their defeat. In the next period (from the late 1620s to the second half of the 18th century), another discontinuity comes in a form of Recatholisation and Germanisation of Czech regions as well as the gradually replacement of the old Czech aristocratic families by the Austrian ones in the highest state positions. In the Afterwards, this was undone with the establishment of the Czechoslovak state in 1918 and the enactment of a wide legislation of an anti-German nature (for instance, it consisted of revocation of nobility and a land reform that led to land expropriation of noble families - the reform was indeed outlined as an atonement for the White Mountain), with not allowing the Czechoslovak Germans to contribute to the constitution of a new state, or with their secondary position in the political milieu of the interwar Czechoslovakia. Another discontinuity was marked by the Munich Agreement in 1938 and a decision made by the European powers that resulted in the loss of the Sudetenland to Germany – historical borderlands settled by German colonists for a thousand of years. The Sudetenland was annexed to Germany and the Czech residents were expelled. In the spring of 1939, the rest of the Czech territory was seized, and the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia was established starting the period of German occupation. After the liberation in 1945, there comes another atonement for injustices made by Germany in a form of the ratification of the Beneš decrees applying the principle of collective guilt, after which the German

³⁴ Jeffrey C. Alexander, *Trauma. A Social Theory* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2012).

³⁵ Karel B. Müller, *Češi a občanská společnost* (Prague: Triton, 2002).

³⁶ Ladislav Holy, *The Little Czech and the Great Czech Nation: National Identity and the Post-Communist Social Transformation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

³⁷ See Holy, *The Little Czech*, passim.

population (not only in Sudetenland, but anywhere in Czechoslovakia) was deprived of their property and citizenship, and consequently expelled to Germany, often very brutally.³⁸

Discussion on this topic was initiated again after the collapse of the communist regime³⁹ contemplating the question of the Sudetenland history and the legitimacy of the Beneš decrees. At the level of politics, the issue was resolved by means of bilateral agreements in the 90's,⁴⁰ however, despite generally good German-Czech relations, it reappeared in the highest level of politics several times. For example, in October 2009, then-President Václav Klaus enforced an exception from the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU for the Czech Republic, to prevent – according to his words – the annulment of the Beneš decrees by the European Courts.⁴¹ Regardless of this case, it was usually the extreme-right or extreme-left actors who attacked Germany in relation to the question of the Sudetenland and the Beneš decrees, and who also often criticized the activities of the Sudetendeutsche Landsmannschaft (Sudeten German Homeland Association) led by Bernd Posselt. The question of the Munich Agreement, the Sudetenland and the Beneš decrees has become an integral part of public discussion. According to investigations by the Public Opinion Research Centre, from the beginning of the 90's, there has been a decline in the number of people considering the Beneš decrees (applying the collective guilt) as an act of justice, however it is still a dominant way of perceiving the post-war events – in 2016, 37 % of Czech people viewed the Beneš decrees as fair, another 25 % considered them unfair but something that was a result of historical circumstances and should be put to rest. Only 9 % of population think it is something that should be apologized for, and only 4 % claim that it is not enough to apologize and that the property must be returned, and the rightful owners compensated.⁴² When asked whether the Decrees should remain in effect, 43 % of people in 2016 spoke in favour, 45 % were unable to answer, and 12 % agreed with their annulment.⁴³ Considering this opinion pattern of Czech citizens (and therefore voters), it is evident that, when grasped appropriately, it can play important political role.⁴⁴

³⁸ Kateřina Portmann, „„Jednou Němec. Vždycky Němec.“ Německy mluvící obyvatelstvo v Československu po druhé světové válce,” in „Nechtění“ spoluobčané. Skupiny obyvatel perzekvovaných či marginalizovaných z politických, národnostních, náboženských i jiných důvodů v letech 1945–1989, ed. Jaroslav Pažout, and Kateřina Portmann (Prague and Liberec: ÚSTR and TUL, 2018), 28–42; Jürgen Tampke, *Czech-Germans Relations and the Politics of Central Europe* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 73–93.

³⁹ Václav Houžvička, *Návraty sudetské otázky* (Prague: Karolinum, 2005).

⁴⁰ Tampke, *Czech-Germans Relations*, 149–150.

⁴¹ Lukáš Novotný, “Dekrety, odsun sudetských Němců v historické paměti Čechů. Výsledky reprezentativního dotazníkového šetření,” *Naše společnost* 10, no. 2 (2012): 30.

⁴² CVVM, “Občané o odsunu a Benešových dekretech,” *Tisková zpráva Centra pro výzkum veřejného mínění* (Prague: CVVM, 2017), 1.

⁴³ CVVM, “Občané o odsunu,” 2.

⁴⁴ Regarding the occupation and conflicts, for the sake of completeness and overall context, it is necessary to briefly mention two more actors whose historical influence is reflected in current politics. The first one is Russia, especially due to the Soviet occupation of Czechoslovakia (1936–1990). A Soviet soldier in the streets of the Czech cities became a symbol of ‘the others’, or national enemies. In the post-communist development, this occupation of more than twenty years became a part of political discourse as a negative historical experience, and it was expressed institutionally by the Czech Republic joining the Western structures, including NATO. That is one of the reasons why we can find a strong anti-Russian attitudes (see Radka Klvaňová, “‘The Russians are back’: Symbolic boundaries and cultural trauma in immigration from the former Soviet Union to the Czech Republic,” *Ethnicities* 19, no. 1 (2019): 136–55, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1468796817752740>). However, in current Czech politics, we can also find strong pro-Russian attitudes that are often carried by the same subjects as the anti-German and anti-Muslim attitudes. That brings us to the third historical experience with conflict and with a threat of occupation and subjugation related to the efforts of the Ottoman Empire to militarily invade Europe. ‘Turks at Vienna’ is a concept that has become a timeless metaphor for the Islamic danger to Europe and was revived mostly in relation to the alleged immigration crisis of today. Although the Muslim community in the

Throughout the whole development after the Velvet Revolution, it is possible to find several strong Zeman's statements against Germany, mainly regarding the Sudeten German question. Already in 1994, he stated it was inadmissible to consider the restitution of property confiscated after the war from the German residents, and their return to the Czech Republic; he also criticized the forthcoming Czech-German declaration whose goal was to terminate the history of mutual conflicts. Not long before the presidential election in 2003, he called the Sudeten Germans Hitler's fifth column, which was quite unfortunate considering the Czech efforts to join the EU. Among other things, it led to the postponement of the German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder's visit. We can also see Miloš Zeman attacking specific individuals – for example, he compared the Sudetendeutsche Landsmannschaft leader (Sudeten German Homeland Association's leader) Bernd Posselt, based on his appearance, to "Hitler after fattening". In other cases, Zeman adopted historical references related to Sudeten Germans or Nazism for labelling people whom he viewed as his political opponents – he compared the Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat to Adolf Hitler, or above all, already in 1992, he compared the Federal Prime Minister Václav Klaus to the Sudeten Nazi Konrad Henlein with regard to the plan for the dissolution of Czechoslovakia, he denounced Klaus' effort to destroy the state as unconstitutional as were the Sudeten German efforts to dissolve the state before the Second World War.⁴⁵

Zeman presented the most interesting comments on the historical relation to Germany within the debates before the second round of the first direct presidential election in 2013.⁴⁶ During this campaign, Zeman's opponent Karel Schwarzenberg⁴⁷ was repeatedly labelled a politician who defends the interests of the Sudeten Germans and whose motivation for being elected is enabling the restitution of the confiscated German property. A whole range of false statements were produced within the campaign – for example the one that the above-mentioned Bernd Posselt supported Schwarzenberg's candidacy. Mainly in the discussion broadcasted by the Czech Television, both candidates clashed over the issue of the Beneš decrees. In this exchange of views, Miloš Zeman played a role of a protector of the nation, whereas Schwarzenberg was forced into a position of someone from international circles trying to question the post-war deportation of the Germans. In the following discussion led across several media, many debating people (just like Zeman earlier) viewed Schwarzenberg as someone trying to disparage the post-war President Edvard Beneš and the patriotism of Czech soldiers and citizens, and to jeopardize the property and ownership rights of the Czech citizens, by which he would de facto re-establish the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia.⁴⁸

Czech Republic is insignificant in numbers and relatively well integrated (see Ondřej Beránek, and Bronislav Ostránský, ed., *Stíny minaretů. Islám a muslimové jako předmět českých veřejných polemik* (Prague: Academia, 2016)), and almost no Muslims came to the Czech Republic as a part of the 'migration wave' of last couple of years, Muslims have been put into the number one position of 'the others'. It is a part of the above-outlined trend of European populism where Islam has become the main target of the *new xenophobia*. In the Czech environment, the image of a 'Turk at Vienna' is often used as a timeless metaphor and an evidence for the ancient aspiration of Muslims to conquer Europe.

⁴⁵ Kopeček, *Miloš Zeman*, passim.

⁴⁶ Lukáš Novotný, "Die deutsch-tschechischen Beziehungen und die Präsidentschaftswahl 2013," *Austrian Journal of Political Science* 44, no. 4 (2016): 13–24, <https://doi.org/10.15203/ozp.323.vol44iss4I>.

⁴⁷ Karel Schwarzenberg (full name Karl Johannes Nepomuk Josef Norbert Friedrich Antonius Wratistlaw Mena Fürst zu Schwarzenberg) is the member of the Czech branch of the German aristocratic Schwarzenberg family born in 1937. After the Communist coup in 1948, his family emigrated to Austrian exile. After the fall of the Communist régime, Schwarzenberg returned to his homeland. In 1990, he was appointed chancellor of the office of the president Václav Havel. Since this times, Schwarzenberg has been the member of Czech political elite. In 2009, he established the new conservative party called TOP09. A significant part of his business companies are located in Austria.

⁴⁸ Hynek Jeřábek, Jan Rössler, and Pavel Sklenařík, "Mediální obraz Karla Schwarzenberga v tištěných denících před prezidentskými volbami 2013," *Naše společnost* 11, no. 2 (2013): 11–12, <https://doi.org/10.13060/1214-438X.2013.11.2.1>.

The way how Schwarzenberg was depicted by Zeman (and his supporters) entirely corresponds with the principles of populism. Zeman put himself in a position of a protector of interests of the people (in a sense of nation), Schwarzenberg was presented as the corrupt elite who defends political interests and assets of the people and the elite from a foreign (and de facto enemy) country, therefore interests of ‘the others’, which harms the Czech people.⁴⁹ Voting for Zeman is thus voting for the Czech national interests. The given situation is also an exemplary case of what role can the reference to historical events play in contemporary populist politics.

Each of the above-mentioned ‘others’ of the Czech politics holds a different position in Zeman’s rhetoric. Russia is not constructed as a source of threat by Zeman, but as a partner.⁵⁰ This is incidentally typical for several Central European populists, for example Viktor Orbán.⁵¹ On the other hand, Muslims are perceived as the number one enemy and Zeman’s rhetoric against them has already been (at least partially) analysed.⁵² Unlike Zeman’s relation to Islam, his attitude toward Germany during his presidential term has not yet been analysed in detail, which creates an interesting area fitting in the outlined debate on populism and the use of historical references for constructing ‘the others’. Mainly the way how Zeman worked with the images of the (Sudeten) Germans within his internal political strategies (see above) shortly before being elected anticipates similar behaviour also during his mandate.

Data and methodology of the analysis

The procedure of the following analysis will comply with the principles of a qualitative content analysis using CAQDAS,⁵³ which is often applied when investigating political practice of populism at the level of communication strategies.⁵⁴ Individual steps reflect the aspiration to identify populist communication strategies in analysed texts – strategies that aim to strengthen the principles of anti-elitism and people-centrism combined with creating the image of Germany and the Germans as ‘the Others’. The empirical corpus consists of all official speeches, statements, interviews, articles, etc., ergo all official production of Miloš Zeman in the period from March 2013 to March 2018, Zeman’s whole first presidential term. These data are available in a form of a text at Miloš Zeman’s personal website www.zemanmilos.cz. The total volume of the empirical corpus is 730,192 words.

Based on previous research, knowledge of the context and the first reading of the data, two presumptions about Zeman’s vision of Germany posing a threat to the Czech people were made related to the questions asked in the introduction of this text: 1/ *The Sudeten Germans supported by Hitler were the source of historical threat* (as a prelude to the following occupation and establishment of the Protectorate), *and they remain to be a threat even now*. 2/ *Angela Merkel’s migration policy is currently the source of threat*. Both presumptions indicate the construction of the Germans as ‘the others’ threatening the Czech people whose representative Zeman claims to be. Regarding these

⁴⁹ Cf. Lenka Bušítková, and Petra Guasti, “The State as a Firm: Understanding the Autocratic Roots of Technocratic Populism,” *East European Politics and Societies and Cultures* 33, no. 2 (2019): 313, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0888325418791723>.

⁵⁰ See Naxera, and Krčál, ““This is a Controlled Invasion””; Kopeček, *Miloš Zeman*, passim.

⁵¹ See Benazzo, “Not All the Past”.

⁵² Ondřej Slačálek, and Eva Svobodová, “The Czech Islamophobic movement: beyond ‘populism’?,” *Patterns of Prejudice* 52, no. 5 (2018): 479–95, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0031322X.2018.1495377> ; Naxera and Krčál, “This is a Controlled Invasion”.

⁵³ E.g. Roel Popping, *Computer-Assisted Text Analysis* (London: Sage, 2000).

⁵⁴ Ondřej Stulík, “Do we have all the necessary data? The challenge of measuring populism through metaphors,” *Quality and Quantity* 53 (2019): 2653–70, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11135-019-00878-6>.

presumptions, various terms were set and their lemmas mechanically looked up in the empirical corpus. The first term was Germany. However, other terms were also searched: the first pair consisted of actors representing the threat – Adolf Hitler and Angela Merkel. The second pair should consist of specific phenomena posing a direct threat to the Czech people – the Sudeten Germans and migration. Based on the knowledge of the context and familiarity with the corpus, it was evident that there would be a high frequency of the word ‘migration’ even when not related to the question of Germany, so the word was accordingly removed from the mechanically searched terms and it was manually looked up later within the search results (see below). Initially, via the MAXQDA11+ software, the terms ‘Germany’, ‘Merkel’, ‘Hitler’ and ‘Sudetenland’ were found. This first phase of coding was carried out at the level of clauses/sentences with the result of 728 unique sentences containing one of the searched terms.

Afterwards, it was necessary to clean the results manually – when reading individual occurrences, some of the false results were removed from the corpus – for instance, this concerns the questions raised by the interviewer, a repetitive occurrence of a frequent Czech surname ‘Němec’ (meaning ‘German’), etc. In the following step, I focused on the evaluation of the search results – first, the findings with no connection to the idea of Germany as a source of threat were set aside.

The next step was to determine the context of the rest of the findings that were related to Germany as a source of threat and that were the subject of the following analysis. The unit of reference is not only a sentence, but also a paragraph that, with regard to the character of the empirical corpus, I understood as five consequent sentences (before and after the occurrence of a searched term), which, among other things, made it possible to discover the term ‘migration’ related to Germany that had been omitted for the purposes of the first search. When there were more than five sentences containing the searched term in the defined paragraph with logical connection to each other, they were all assigned to the searched code. This approach (transferring from sentences to paragraphs) significantly reduced the number of findings. On the other hand, one paragraph can contain several different codes since there is a possibility of overlapping contexts.

As part of the following open inductive coding, two metacodes relating to the idea of Germany as a source of threat to the Czech people – THREAT IN THE PAST (46 occurrences in total) and CURRENT THREAT (120 occurrences in total), whereas in some cases, the two metacodes overlap (which means that Zeman creates a parallel between historical and current dangers – for more details see below). During the reading of the found passages, individual codes were assigned to the metacodes. In case of the THREAT IN THE PAST metacode, there are the following codes: THE SUDETEN GERMANS WERE A THREAT (12 occurrences) and NAZI GERMANY AND THE OCCUPATION WERE THREATS (34). The code structure considers whether the source of threat was domestic (Sudeten Germans) or foreign (Nazi Germany as a whole). The CURRENT THREAT metacode was divided into these codes: GERMANY SUPPORTS MIGRATION (37), GERMANY WILL DEPORT THE MIGRANTS TO THE CZECH REPUBLIC (14), GERMANY WILL CLOSE THE BORDERS (11), GERMANY SUPPORTS MIGRANT QUOTAS (7), and OTHERS (15).

The next chapter introduces statements representing individual codes, whereas the main ambition of the analysis is to capture the populist practice of the speaker – President Zeman – through identifying a set of metaphors. The presented word-for-word quotes are meant to characterize the logic of the empirical corpus – they are not presented only for their uniqueness, but to the contrary, because they define the overall tone of the corpus.

Germany as a source of threat to the Czech people: interpretation of Zeman's statements

Although the frequency of codes classified under the THREAT IN THE PAST metacode is lower, it seems reasonable (with regard to the focus of this text) to start the analysis with this very metacode. From the frequency of codes related to the question of the Sudeten Germans, the first conclusion can be drawn – contrary to presumptions based on how often Zeman spoke negatively of this question before his presidential term (including intensive dealing with the topic as part of the election campaign), Zeman mentioned the Sudetenland issue only occasionally during his first term, furthermore he did not relate the topic to current political events, he only hinted it in connection with the question of material compensation. On the contrary, in relation to this topic, he repeatedly stated: “History cannot prevent us from seeing the present and the future”, or “the Sudeten German association became a harmless homeland association by changing their statute [they removed the claim for property confiscated on the Czechoslovak territory before the expulsion based on the Beneš decrees].”

We can draw similar conclusions also in relation to the occupation of the rest of the country that followed shortly after the Sudetenland annexation. Zeman mentioned the issue of occupation and German supremacy several times: “[I am grateful that] we do not have to speak German in this country, given we were obedient collaborators with Aryan descent, that we do not have to say Heil Hitler, Heil Himmler, Heil Göring, or possibly Heil Heydrich, which would be particularly interesting. Remember that quoted Heydrich himself said in September 1941 at the Prague Castle that the Czechs had no place here on this territory after all. We were meant to be exterminated right after the Jews. Because the Slavic people were an inferior race.” We can find more examples, for instance: “apparent disapproval of the nation with the German occupation.”

The whole logic of Zeman's statements about the topic of the Sudetenland and the following occupation can be summarized in this metaphorical scheme:

the Sudeten Germans were a source of danger (they harmed the Czech people) → the foreign elite helped the Sudeten Germans (Hitler, as well as the European governments through the Munich Agreement) → the danger was eliminated (by defeating Germany) → the Sudeten Germans were rightly punished (the expulsion from Czechoslovakia and property confiscation) → the Sudeten German Homeland Association is no longer a problem

The Germans constituted ‘the Others’ threatening the Czech nation with the support of the international elite, however Zeman maintains this course only when reflecting the period of the Second World War. In contrast to a couple of decades before Zeman took the presidential office, and several strong statements about this period of history, he does not currently refer to the annexation of the Sudetenland, the occupation, the establishment of the Protectorate, the Beneš decrees and the expulsion of the Germans instrumentally within the populist othering of contemporary Germany. In that respect, we cannot qualify Zeman's rhetoric as populist.

We get considerably different conclusions viewing today's Germany as a source of threat. The vast majority of argumentation detected within the CURRENT THREAT metacode deals with the question of migration and Muslims. As has already been pointed out, it is a topic Zeman actively uses in his rhetoric strategies.⁵⁵ The GERMANY SUPPORTS MIGRATION code was most frequently represented. For this code, I assigned Zeman's statements claiming that Germany directly (for example, via invitations) or indirectly (via generous social programmes) invites migrants. That can be illustrated with the following statements: “Two or three years ago, Madam Chancellor publicly stated that multiculturalism was dead. Based on the insufficient or almost non-existent assimilation of the

⁵⁵ See Naxera and Krčál, ““This is a Controlled Invasion””.

Muslim minorities in Western Europe. And now, by welcoming refugees, she clearly supports multiculturalism.” “Why are the refugees heading to Germany? Just for the country’s social welfare system. They do not seek the high German salaries; they want to exploit the social programmes.”

The incoming Muslim population is, according to Zeman, inassimilable: “I spoke very clearly about the Muslim community and gave examples from France, Britain or Germany where this community did not get assimilated, with all respect to exceptions, and where they formed some sort of ghettos that are giving rise to terrorist actions.” That brings not only a threat to the Western culture, but also a threat to the people, because Zeman repeatedly connects incoming migrants and refugees with terrorism threats: “Do you know how many Syrian passports got falsified after Angela Merkel declared the intention to accept Syrians? However, I find it naïve to assume that there will be no jihadists smuggled in by the Islamic State.” “I see what is going on in Belgium, France, Germany, what is going on in other neighbouring countries with regard to the wave of immigrants from the Middle East and Northern Africa.” According to Zeman, the risk of a terrorist attack is high: “German Intelligence Service estimates that there are about 15 thousand of them [potential terrorist – author’s note] in Germany alone, and since a number of them are so-called lone wolves, which means those who commit terrorist acts individually (although instructed from the Islamic centre), you can expect quite a large number of terrorist attacks.”

With all this, the German government led by Merkel impairs the security not only of Germany, but also of other European countries, mainly the Czech Republic. There are several reasons – thanks to the Schengen Agreement, migrants can freely cross the German-Czech border. At the same time, according to Zeman, Germany can start with activities leading to the increase of the number of migrants in the Czech Republic, these activities are expressed through other codes. The first one relates to the already-mentioned question of European quotas for migrant redistribution supported by Germany and protested by the Czech Republic: “As perhaps the first sentence of the meeting, I told Madam Chancellor that you do not send your guests to your neighbour’s house for lunch either, which was a reference to the fact that they first invited illegal migrants and then, with the help of redistribution quotas, they wanted to reallocate them outside Germany.” In addition to migrant quotas, other threat lies in the closing of German-Austrian border that would result in discontinuation of a major migration route and its redirection through the Czech Republic to Germany: “The duty of the Army of the Czech Republic is to prevent specific acts of crime, which can be significant, especially in case of closing the Austrian-German borders and, as the Chief of the General Staff has already noted, in case the migration wave shifts to the Czech Republic as the transit country.” Zeman explicitly securitizes this scenario with references to the Czech Republic being flooded with a dangerous element in case of closure of the borders: “If Germany and Austria closed the borders, the Minister of Defence says that the Army would be prepared for action in six hours, not weeks or days, but in six hours.” The third often mentioned problem is connected with a situation when Germany should start returning the economic migrants who came to Germany through the Czech Republic: “I would like to warn against the illusion that nothing is going on, that people just pass to Germany and end up there. That would be true if they stayed in Germany, however, Germany itself stated that they will return the economic migrants, who, in my opinion, are in the majority, and they will naturally return them to the country where they came from, in this case the Czech Republic.”

According to Zeman, this has clear repercussions: “The risk of a terrorist attack on the Czech soil would increase with Austria and Germany closing their borders. That would make the Czech Republic a transit country for refugees streaming to Germany, but also a country, to which Germany would return the refugees who do not receive asylum”

Based on the structure of Zeman’s argumentation, we can observe several basic principles connected with the perception of Germany as a source of threat to the Czech Republic due to German migration policy. We can schematize the structure of Zeman’s statements with the help of these metaphors:

*Germany supports (directly or indirectly) immigration from the Islamic countries
→ Islam cannot be assimilated → Islam poses a security risk (there are terrorists
among the migrants) → a threat to Germany → (due to Germany’s efforts to*

redistribute or return migrants) *a threat to the Czech Republic → the foreign elite endangers the Czech people*

In relation to the image of Germany as a source of threat, it is possible to qualify Zeman's rhetoric as populist. We find a clear appeal to the nation and its security, furthermore, it is apparent from Zeman's statements (and included terms, such as 'we', 'Czech', 'ours', 'us', etc.) that the nation is the equivalent of the people. The people are threatened by 'the others' – their role is played mostly by Muslims, but also Germany itself. Germany, personalised by Chancellor Merkel, simultaneously represent the bad international elite that (in liaison with other elites – perhaps the leaders of the EU enforcing the migrant quotas) is hostile to the (de facto German, but mainly Czech) people.

If Germany is the source of threat, the real source are current German activities, not the historical demands related to the Sudeten question. Nevertheless, there are several examples in the corpus of using historical references related to Germany in order to support current political claims. This concerns a couple of cases when Zeman generated a parallel between the threat of Nazism and Hitler's efforts on one hand, and the threat of current Islam on the other. Yet it should be reminded that Zeman does not distinguish between Islam and Islamism, he finds both terms (respectively the people behind them) equally problematic.⁵⁶ The lean toward this historical parallel is expressed by these statement examples: "I talked about the fact that, in contrast to the Holocaust, an act of crime against the Jews, but if Germany won the war, it would target the Slavs as well, so now the danger comes from the Islamic terrorism that states this publicly – murder or enslave everyone who does not practice their faith." Zeman discursively links Islam and Nazism in many cases: "A new enemy emerges, international terrorism based on hateful ideology, in a way very similar to the ideology of the Nazi Germany." "However, everyone who shows no concern about the migration wave resembles someone who was not concerned with the emergence of Nazism in Germany either."

Therefore, from the historical point of view, the Czech nation was threatened by activities of the Nazi Germany conducted by Hitler and (at least at the beginning and indirectly) supported and enabled by other European countries. Presently, the same threat is represented by Islam and Islamic terrorism that settles in Europe primarily thanks to current German migration policy. Angela Merkel represents the role of the foreign elite supported by other members of this elite (EU with their claim for quotas), whose activities directly endanger the Czech people by enabling (and de facto supporting) the infiltration of Islam viewed as a security issue. Germany led by Merkel thus plays the role of 'the Others' who harm the Czech nation by supporting more 'Others' represented by the Muslims.

All statements related to this topic and completed with the above-presented metaphors can be schematized as follows:

Nazi Germany and Hitler threatened the Czech people → Islam is the same as Nazism → Chancellor Merkel and the German foreign policy support Islam → contemporary Germany threatens the Czech people in a similar way Nazi Germany did

In this regard, Zeman's rhetoric is clearly populist. We find all key elements of populism – emphasis on the Czech people threatened by the Muslims in the same way it was once threatened by Hitler's Germany, in both cases with the help of the international elite.

The Future Research Agenda?

Let us recall the situation from the period before the first direct presidential election in 2013. The way how Miloš Zeman approached the question of the Sudeten Germans during the pre-election debates was a textbook populism. He defended himself actively as a protector of people's interests against the corrupt elite represented by Karel Schwarzenberg who defended the interests of 'the Others' at the

⁵⁶ See Naxera and Krčál, "This is a Controlled Invasion".

expense of the Czech people. Zeman's rhetoric in this period was a climax of the series of his statements related to the Sudeten Germans of over the past 20 years. After taking the presidential office, the situation changed and Zeman ceased to talk about the current threat from the Sudeten Germans. When speaking of the Sudeten Germans during the last few years, he speaks of them as of 'the Others' harming the Czech nation with the help of the foreign elite only in relation to history, and he does not present the current activities of the Sudetendeutsche Landsmannschaft (Sudeten German Homeland Association) as a source of threat anymore. The first presumption of this text has been confirmed only partially and in relation to the historical event itself.

On the other hand, Zeman focused his populist rhetoric vigorously on the activities of contemporary Germany, mainly on their migration policy.⁵⁷ The way he speaks of the topic is evidently populist and contains all key components – targeting the necessity of protecting the people (Czech nation) against the interests of the international elite (represented by Chancellor Merkel and the EU representatives) acting in the interests of 'the Others' (the Germans and especially Muslims who are presented as a 'cosmic evil'). The Germans are perceived as the problem, mostly because their policy enables the arrival and advance of the 'principle evil' in a form of the Muslims. The second presumption of the text has been fully confirmed.

During Zeman's first presidential term, the topic of Islam, Muslims and immigrants took the position of the biggest threat to the Czech nation within Zeman's rhetoric.⁵⁸ He practically stopped speaking of other threats – one of the examples is the question of the Sudeten Germans. Although several politicians from the spectrum close to Zeman still operate with this issue,⁵⁹ the President himself no longer addresses it, which he explains with the fact that the Sudeten Germans waived their property claims in the Czech Republic. Even though Zeman began to define the main source of threat to the Czech Republic (and Europe) unambiguously in relation to Islam, we cannot say he ceased to perceive Germany as a source of threat – he still does that actively, however exclusively in relation to the questions of Islam and migration. Although this analysis focused on the question of Germany as a threat to the Czech borders, the results show that German threat lies mainly in the fact that it mediates much bigger danger than Germany itself does. The results demonstrate the relevance of an extensive contemporary research of Islamophobia and anti-Islamic attitudes of populist politicians. Islam proves to be the frame of reference, from which the populists promise to protect the Western civilization.⁶⁰ Hereby, the power of the topic of Islam manifests – although there is no direct experience in the Czech Republic with the dangers arising from migration and Islam, the topic somehow dominates the Czech politics. Given that a systematic analysis of Zeman's statements against Islam was carried out only to a limited extent and with a specific grasp,⁶¹ it would be convenient for further research of the current debate on populism to be focused on Zeman's perception of Islam and Muslims as 'the Others' and a source of threat. Such research could be also aimed at narrow and specific topics. One of them is the use of historical parallels and links intended to delegitimize Islam. The attention of the research on populism could be then focused on whether and what role historical references play in the process of populist othering. Historical references used in such way can be related to current issues that have no direct connection with the topic. History serves only as a frame of reference for defining oneself

⁵⁷ There are no other types of threats featured in Zeman's rhetoric that might be present in the Czech environment (for example, the idea of German economic supremacy).

⁵⁸ Michaela Strapáčová, and Vít Hloušek, "Anti-Islamism without Moslems: Cognitive Frames of Czech Antimigrant Politics," *Journal of Nationalism, Memory & Language Politics* 12, no. 1 (2018): 1–30, <https://doi.org/10.2478/jnmlp-2018-0001>.

⁵⁹ An example is the Communist MEP Kateřina Konečná who, right when this text was being finished, problematized the fact that the Czech Minister of Foreign Affairs assigned the Czech Ambassador in Germany for visiting the convention of the Sudetendeutsche Landsmannschaft (Sudeten German Homeland Association). Konečná interpreted this action as betraying the nation and defending foreign interests.

⁶⁰ Cf. Khair, *The New Xenophobia*; Vossen, "Populism in the Netherlands".

⁶¹ See Naxera and Krčál, "“This is a Controlled Invasion”".

negatively, as shown in the above-described example of Zeman's rhetoric strategy classifying Islam as the same problem as Nazism was.

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