

Macron's our man



I studied in France, speak the language fairly well and follow its politics on a daily basis, but I can't claim to understand the country as well as I do the US, the CR or even Russia. This year's French presidential elections are bit baffling for everyone, and the confusion leads to frequent simplifications, such as the idea that the fate of Europe rests on these elections or that only a victory

by Emmanuel Macron can avert disaster for the French.

Given all the simplifications, let me try one or two of my own, even at the risk of getting something wrong.

As soon as Alain Juppé lost the Republicans' primary on Nov. 27 of last year and then, four days later, François Hollande announced that he wouldn't seek reelection for the Socialists, the shoo-in became François Fillon of the Republicans. All looked well for him until his scandals began in late January. In retrospect, everything happened very quickly.

Marine Le Pen kept plodding along, but Emmanuel Macron began the rapid climb that will take him into the run-off next weekend. Looking back, it seems likely that Macron was Hollande's candidate all along and that Fillon had to be sidelined. I see this as no more than a typical battle between political rivals, without much deeper meaning.

On the surface, Fillon was more critical of immigration than Macron (which made Fillon Miloš Zeman's preferred candidate), but otherwise there isn't a great deal of difference between them. They represent the Hillary Clinton side of things, when looked at from the U.S. perspective. Le Pen and Jean-Luc Mélenchon are more the Donald Trump candidates. If either of them were elected, the new president would likely speed up the political decline of France and Europe.

Macron, as the likely second-round winner, will more or less continue the policies of François Hollande, who couldn't run because he was so unpopular. The French will now get his protégé, perhaps without even realizing it.

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Analysis for the week April 21-28, 2017

"Let's congratulate Petr Kellner and Radek Pokorný," we wrote yesterday on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#) (in Czech). "Oh, and also Petr Dvořák."

The meaning of this is that the real winners in the reelection this week of Dvořák as CEO of Czech TV were two businessmen, Kellner of PPF and lawyer Pokorný, who is the unofficial head of what we call ČSSD a.s. They helped make sure Dvořák was elected, and he is there to serve their interests, but to do so in a way that allows him to retain sufficient credibility to stay in office. He is in fact quite good at doing all this.

"Which outcome would have been better this week?" a few people asked critically. This misses the point entirely. Perhaps one of the other candidates would have been a better professional manager than Dvořák, but it's unlikely, because anyone clever and informed enough to understand and run Czech TV wouldn't mount a serious campaign against Dvořák, because he or she would know that the chances of success were zero. This isn't necessarily to diminish the other candidates who ran. They might not all be naive. In at least a few cases, it seems clear that they ran to boost their own profile and to have a bit of fun, which are entirely legitimate motivations.

On the surface, Dvořák has done a good job of improving ČT in terms of its programming and coverage, so his reelection didn't lead to widespread protests. However, there is a group of politicians

and businesspeople, mostly with a connection to Pres. Miloš Zeman, who voiced strong opposition at a seminar in the Senate on April 11. Zeman's spokesman, Jiří Ovčáček, used the opportunity to criticize the public station as being the mouthpiece of the "liberal left," which he said has members in almost every political party who are joined by their criticism of Zeman and Andrej Babiš.

As Ovčáček sees it, ČT often matches the guests on shows such as OVM so that they attack each other but then join forces to criticize Zeman and Babiš. A good example of this came [last Sun.](#), when Milan Chovanec of ČSSD faced off against MP Alexander Černý of the Communists. Černý criticized people who think that just because they have money, they can go into politics and change things in a way that makes them more money. This is absolutely immoral, he said. When asked later about a coalition of ANO and the Communists, he said he wouldn't support this in any form, whether an open coalition or one with silent support.

Ovčáček also took aim at ČT for a negative report on [Reportéři ČT](#) (the same show that Babiš repeatedly criticizes) about a clinic of Chinese medicine supported by Zeman's favorite Chinese investor, CEFC. Ovčáček was angry that the report failed to mention Radek Pokorný, who acts as CEFC's lawyer.

Herein lies the main paradox at ČT. Zeman is PPF's man, and Czech TV is partly PPF's domain, but the station

often goes against Zeman, while showing deference to Pokorný's interests. This is because Kellner and Pokorný have different interests. Kellner's main goal is to keep his name off ČT as much as possible, whereas Pokorný wants to use the "left-liberal" slant of the station to support the day-to-day business interests and politics of ČSSD a.s. Increasingly, Kellner's interests don't coincide with Pokorný's.

This was most visible in the dispute over high mobile-data rates, which ČT helped to start by allowing a ČTÚ councilor to say on the air that Kellner's O2 CR is the "biggest miscreant" among operators. ČSSD latched onto this and started calling for lower rates. (However, we should point out that some informed readers tell us that the dispute between ČSSD and the operators is all staged and that ČSSD will not push through lower rates before PPF sells O2 to the Chinese.)

Pokorný wanted to speed up the reelection of Dvořák (and did), because his position at ČT is threatened by a Babiš victory in the upcoming parliamentary elections. PPF's position is secure no matter how the elections turn out, but if Babiš becomes the PM, the power-sharing at ČT will take on a new form. This, as we see it, is why Babiš ultimately wasn't very critical of Dvořák's reelection this week. He knows how to deal with someone like Dvořák, as long as Pokorný isn't around.

The best CEO of Czech TV would be a truly independent one, but that, given the situation, was an impossibility.