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Six candidates hoping to be elected as Czech president accepted invitations sent by the Rector of Charles University, the Department of International Relations, the Institute of Political Studies (IPS), the Faculty of Social Sciences and the Prague Security Studies Institute to a debate on the 28th November 2012. The debate, held at Charles University, was held to discuss issues regarding national security and international politics.

The Rector of Charles University, Prof. Václav Hampl, began the discussion with a statement that public universities must be apolitical, meaning that universities should neither take a party political stance, nor allow advertisement for political parties. However, he went on to say that: "The first direct presidential election in our country is such an important thing that, when I was approached by our long term partner the Prague Security Studies Institute with the suggestion to organize an expert debate on the topic, something long discussed at the university, I felt that organizing such a debate was exactly the kind of public service that the university is supposed to guarantee the people". The quality of the debate was monitored by the Department of International Relations.

To secure political impartiality, all candidates for the presidency were invited. The following candidates were able to come to the Blue Hall at Charles University: Mgr. Jiří Dienstbier Jr., Ing. Jan Fischer, CSc., Táňa Fischerová, Karel Schwarzenberg, MUDr. Přemysl Sobotka and Ing. Miloš Zeman, CSc.

The almost 2.5 hours long discussion had a set format. Each candidate received the same ten questions, 5 from the moderators, 4 from students in the auditorium, and the last question was reserved for Professor Hampl. The candidates had 45 seconds to answer each question. Originally, it was intended that each of the candidates would receive one follow up question, but due to time constraints this was not possible.

In the first round of questions the candidates stated their view on national security and foreign affairs. They all agreed that the priority of the Czech Republic should be good relations with neighbouring countries and sharing ideas on how to deal with the economic crisis. The second question was about political integration, and the participants in the debate touched both on the introduction of the European banking union and on open EU borders.

The third question was asked by a student of the Faculty of Social Sciences, who was interested to know the candidates' view on Czech energy policy. Táňa Fischerová was strictly against nuclear energy; she said she strongly preferred renewable resources. Similarly, Jiří Dienstbier was against nuclear power. He preferred allowing the current nuclear plants to complete their technological life span, whilst using new technologies and renewable resources. Those candidates who disagreed with this view included Miloš Zeman, who believes that the Czech Republic should use nuclear energy, and that the time has come to end "solar energy madness". Jan Fischer shared Zeman's view, and also state his support for the enlargement of the Temelín Power Plant. Přemysl Sobotka stated he cautiously supports nuclear energy, but as a rentgenologist, he said he knew very well how harmful radiation could be. Karel Schwarzenberg also supports the use of the nuclear energy over the next twenty years, though only as a necessity.

The other questions were on Czech-US relations, the Czech military, boosting the competitiveness of Czech firms on the foreign market, discord between the posts of the president and the prime minister, the importance of human rights, and EU policies regarding the indebted nations of Southern Europe.

The last question was given by Professor Hampl, who was interested to know (as many at Charles University are), what criteria would be used by the candidates when awarding state distinctions for science, research or education.

What were the answers of the candidates?

Jiří Dienstbier: "The president should reward those outstanding personalities from different fields of public life. Certainly both scientists and those who dedicate themselves to teaching, and helping ensure that our society is a cultivated and educated one, have earned such distinction, and they have also earned good funding."

Miloš Zeman: "The president, no matter who is elected in the end, should, with the exception of sportsmen, award only people of middle and older age as you can usually only see any concrete work behind them around 60 years of age, no matter if they are scientists or anything else. Should Baťa not have had a university degree, I would still prefer to award him instead of a person with university education and no great achievements."

Karel Schwarzenberg: "I do not believe that only an old person should receive an award; younger people be able to achieve results, heroes are sometimes young. Any Czech scientist would however prefer a grant to any medal."

Táňa Fischerová: "It is always a joy if society has enough people who can be acknowledged both for their expert knowledge as well as their moral character, as such a distinction is not just an award for one individual but also a hallmark

for society as to whom we should appreciate and view as an example. I do not agree that an award should be given only for the scientific achievements, or simultaneously for the morality of the awarded person. I would personally prefer that the award would be given for both."

Přemysl Sobotka: "To award distinctions is one of the better duties of the president, and I believe that both post-revolutionary presidents exercised this right well. We have behind us the history of the second and third resistance, with a number of scientists, sportsmen, artists, etc. I would follow this trend no matter the age of the awardees."