

Slovakia: no more assertiveness in the European policy

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The Slovakian government, which lost the vote of confidence during the poll on the EFSF reform on 11 October, is to continue ruling the country until the early parliamentary elections scheduled for March 2012. On 20 October, four centre-right parties, which had previously formed the government led by Iveta Radicová, agreed on the conditions for their further co-operation. The liberal party, SaS, whose members opposed the EFSF reform and did not back the confidence vote, agreed to support the governmental budget draft in exchange for adopting its proposal to limit MP immunity. However, the amendment of the constitution, which was adopted by parliament on 21 October, was a condition necessary for Radicová's cabinet to continue its rule. The left-wing opposition, whose votes were needed to amend the constitution, forced the centre-right to seriously reduce the competences of the transitional government. It will not be able to take decisions in key issues concerning the economy as well as internal and foreign policy, furthermore the government's staff policy will depend on the president's countersignature.

Commentary

- The reduction of the Slovak government's competences has seriously impaired its negotiating mandate in the EU. One of the likely consequences will be Slovakia softening its stance in European policy. That shift is supported by the president and the Social Democrats (Smer-SD), who can control the government's major moves and who are the undisputed leaders of the pre-election polls. The political situation in Slovakia, following the complications with the ratification of the EFSF reform, means a defeat for the policy of attempting to actively influence the development of the situation in the eurozone. It should be expected that the future Slovak government, which in all likelihood will be formed by the Smer-SD leader Robert Fico, will want to co-operate closely with Germany and France on the reform of the EU.
- The agreement concerning the interim government formally enables the centre-right to continue its rule. This, however, will in fact mean the end of reforms and the start of an electoral campaign. This situation is putting at stake the government's plans to reduce the budget deficit next year to 3.8% of GDP (from a level of 4.9% of GDP forecast for this year). The centre-right parties will compete for the votes of a very similar electorate and will blame each other for the political crisis, which is likely to cause more disputes within this camp.

- The government's weak position in the pre-election period and the expected tensions between the centre-right parties are strengthening the position of Smer-SD. This party, which has been accusing the weakened cabinet being deficient in ruling skills, will present itself as a grouping which will guarantee stability on the political scene. At the same time, Smer-SD is likely to conduct behind-the-scenes negotiations with centre-right parties to probe for the possibilities to form a coalition following the elections.