

Prospects for the centre-right coalition in Slovakia

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The left-wing party Smer-SD (Direction-Social Democracy), led by Prime Minister Robert Fico, had a landslide victory in the parliamentary election in Slovakia. The most likely outcome is, however, that the party will go into opposition as its coalition partners to date obtained poor results. The four centre-right parties which have the majority of seats in parliament have started forming the ruling coalition. The new government will refer to the legacy of the reformist government of Mikulas Dzurinda. It will however be under pressure from a strong coalition, supported by the president. The establishment of a centre-right government, which will include representatives of the Hungarian minority for the first time in four years, will have a positive impact on relations between Slovakia and Hungary.

Smer has won over the constituents of its coalition partners

In the election held on 12 June Smer clearly improved its score compared to 2006 as it won 62 seats in the 150-seat National Council. An increase in support for Smer occurred however at the expense of its coalition partners: the centrist People's Party – the Movement for a Democratic Slovakia LS-HZDS) of the former Prime Minister Vladimir Mechiar, which did not pass the election threshold, and the Slovak National Party (SNS), which won only 9 seats. Although on 14 June President Ivan Gasparovic assigned Robert Fico with the mission of creating a new government, Fico will probably not be able to secure a majority in the parliament.

Smer conducted a confrontational electoral campaign, which substantially limited its coalition potential. While ruling nearly on its own it projected an image of a party that is the only alternative to the right wing, threatening the social security of Slovak citizens and introducing the Hungarian minority to the government. The actions undertaken by Hungary (particularly the new law on granting citizenship to compatriots from neighbouring countries) and the related fierce reaction of the Slovak authorities made it more difficult for the opposition to hold the left-wing-national government accountable for clientelism and multiple corruption affairs. Despite the fact that playing the "Hungarian card" resulted merely in Smer winning over the electorate of its coalition partners: HZDS and SNS. Suspicions revealed during the electoral campaign that Robert Fico was involved in illegal funding of his party and controversial expenditure from the prime minister's budget reserve (among them funding the Miss Fitness contest) might have led to the mobilisation of opponents of the coalition and compromised the idea of a post-election alliance with Smer. Also significant was the example of the Czech Republic where thanks to the success of the

new parties in the election held in May 2010, the centre-right blocked the way to power for a Smer ally – the Czech Social Democratic Party.

An alternative coalition thanks to new parties

On 15 June the leaders of the centre-right – the Slovak Democratic and Christian Union – Democratic Party (SDKU-DS), Freedom and Solidarity (SaS), the Christian-Democratic Movement (KDH) and the Most-Hid party – signed a political declaration on the construction of a new government. The new government is expected to remedy the consequences of: the “irresponsible policies of the government to date” in the area of the economy, strengthen the state of law, fight corruption and clientelism, restore trust in courts, reform the education and healthcare systems, improve the “political atmosphere” and the position of minorities, and rebuild the position of Slovakia on the international scene.

The possibility of establishing a centre-right government is mainly owed to SaS and Most-Hid since SDKU-DS won less support than in 2006 and KDH obtained only one additional seat. The candidate for the position of prime minister is seen to be the leader of the SDKU-DS electoral list, Iveta Radicova, but Mikulas Dzurinda – who gave up standing for parliament – remains the president of SDKU-DS. The problematic success of this party and the lack of unequivocal leadership in the party can complicate the establishment of the government (e.g. President Gasparovic may appoint Dzurinda as prime minister). Ousting Fico from power is possible thanks to the mobilisation of new voters through the liberal party SaS, led by Richard Sulik, an aide to the Finance Minister at the time of the government of Dzurinda. Sulik is a proponent of the thorough pro-market reforms launched before 2006.

There are divergences among prospective coalition partners concerning the way to reform the pension system and the scope of privatisation. Sulik's pro-market party and a more social-oriented KDH also have different viewpoints (e. g. on the registration of homosexual relationships and decriminalising of soft drugs). Fico is trying to make use of these complications and personal deals (unofficial information reveals that he offered KDH the position of prime minister and half of the seats in the government). The right-wing parties already before the election however declared that they would not enter talks about forming a new government with Smer. Fulfilling this commitment and the establishment of an alternative coalition is being made easier by the fact that the Party of the Hungarian Coalition (SMK) is outside parliament and the interests of Slovak Hungarians will be represented in parliament by Most-Hid, created in spring 2009 by a popular former leader of SMK Bela Bugár. The Party groups together Hungarian activists and Slovak liberals and conservatives.

The impact on Slovak-Hungarian relations

The results of the election in Slovakia constitute a failure of the right wing which is in power in Hungary that pledged its ostentatious support for the Party of the Hungarian Coalition (SMK). A poor score for SMK means that the majority of Slovak Hungarians reject the

project of making Hungarian citizenship a measure of being a true Hungarian and do not want this issue to cause them additional problems. For the majority of Slovak Hungarians the programme of Hungarian-Slovak cooperation proposed by Bela Bugar's Most-Hid of, proved much more credible. Thus the interests of the Hungarian minority will be represented in parliament by a party that is more critical of the initiatives that are being undertaken in Hungary in the field of the development of Hungarian-Hungarian relations (cooperation with the political representation of compatriots in adjacent countries).

After the centre-right government has been established, the Hungarian authorities will not be able to argue that Slovakia's objections to their actions are associated with nationalists being part of the government. The position of the Slovak foreign minister will probably be taken by former Prime Minister Dzurinda, who wields large authority in the EU. The fact that the parties ruling in both countries belong to the European People's Party can contribute to the improvement of Slovak-Hungarian relations. The centre-right government in Slovakia, although it will avoid confrontational rhetoric, will not back off from criticising Hungarian actions that are aimed at developing institutional bonds with compatriots in Slovakia and will call for the use of bilateral consultative mechanisms. A sustainable improvement in bilateral relations can be made more difficult by the activities of opposition parties in the two countries. Although the right wing ruling in Hungary has a constitutional majority in parliament, they take into account the rhetoric of the opposition radical movement of Jobbik that represents the third force in the Hungarian parliament. In Slovakia the "Hungarian charter" will likely be an important political instrument for the opposition in a tough game with the centre-right government.

Appendix

Results of the election to the National Council of the Republic of Slovakia in 2006 and the repartition of the positions in the government at the beginning of the term

Party	Results in the election	Num
Smer-SD – Direction – Social Democracy	29.14%	50
SDKU-DS – Slovak Democratic and Christian Union – Democratic Party	18.35%	31
SNS – Slovak National Party	11.73%	20
SMK – Party of the Hungarian Coalition	11.68%	20
LS-HZDS – People's Party – Movement for a Democratic Slovakia	8.79%	15
KDH – Christian Democratic Movement	8.31%	14

Results of the election to the National Council of the Republic of Slovakia in 2010 and a probable repartition of the positions in the government in the case of the establishment of a centre-right government

Party	Results in the election	Num
Smer-SD – Direction – Social Democracy	34.79 %	62
SDKU-DS – Slovak Democratic and Christian Union – Democratic Party	15.42 %	28
SaS – „Freedom and Solidarity”	12.14 %	22
KDH – Christian Democratic Movement	8.52 %	15
Most–Hid	8.12 %	14
SNS – Slovak National Party	5.07%	9