

Pre-election anti-terrorist campaign in Slovakia

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In the beginning of December, Slovakia's parliament amended the constitution and adopted a package of anti-terrorist laws vesting the police, the law enforcement agencies and the judiciary with more powers. For example, under the new regulations the police can detain a person suspected of terrorism for 96 hours, and a court may put such a person on remand for up to five years. The constitutional amendments were backed by Smer-SD, the ruling left-wing party led by Prime Minister Robert Fico and the opposition Most-Hid party linked with the Hungarian minority. Slovakia firmly resists the EU's migration policy and warns against terrorists hiding among the migrants. It is also insisting that the European Council's September vote on migration quotas be annulled, and brought a complaint to this effect to the Court of Justice of the European Union on 2 December. The government has announced that Slovakia will not accept migrants in accordance with the quotas set during the European Council's vote, and instead on 11 December brought over 149 Christians from Iraq, who will remain in Slovakia.

Commentary

- The migration crisis and security issues are among the main topics of the campaign leading up to the parliamentary election scheduled for 5 March 2016, even though Slovakia has been neither a transit nor a destination country during the present wave of migration (only 15 asylum requests were submitted in the third quarter of 2015 in Slovakia, the least in the EU). Prime Minister Fico, has linked the issues of migration and terrorism, and is attempting to convince citizens that the risk of terrorism is growing due to the "irresponsible policy of EU institutions". He also insists that Slovakia needs the effective government in order to take firm action and defend the country. The opposition is divided and also opposes receiving migrants, but has no consistent alternative manifesto. The few liberal circles warn against a 'police state', but most Slovaks share the concerns voiced by the prime minister – 62% of them oppose receiving migrants, even on a temporary basis.
- Smer election campaign has seen great emphasis placed on criticising both the EU's response to the migration crisis and also Greece for failing to control the external Schengen border. The Slovak prime minister argues that small countries should stop "being silent and aping the decisions of the large countries." This growing assertiveness in European policy is not limited to the migration crisis, since it also includes opposing the Nord Stream 2 project. Fico usually opts for close co-operation with France and

Germany and still supports intensifying European integration in many areas (for example, the economy and the energy sector). Nevertheless recently, as with the Hungarian prime minister, Viktor Orban, he is opposing the large EU member states ever more frequently using the slogan of protecting his country's national interests.

- By highlighting the threats linked to the migration crisis the government party is able to distract the attention of the media and the voters away from the corruption scandals from a few months ago which have resulted in public support for the political left to fall away. According to pre-election polls, Smer (38%) is definitely ahead of the centre-right parties, the strongest of which, Siet may count on a 13% share of the vote. Although Prime Minister Fico officially prefers a coalition cabinet to be formed after the election, Smer's primary goal is to retain possession of an absolute majority of seats in parliament. Playing the anti-migrant and anti-Islamic card is expected to help them achieve this, since it offers the governing political left the opportunity to take over a section of the electorate of the Slovak National Party (SNS) and to push them below the five per cent election threshold.