

The left-liberal march forward: Pirc Musar is president of Slovenia

Łukasz Kobeszko

The independent candidate Nataša Pirc Musar won the presidential election in Slovenia on 13 November with 53% of the vote. She was supported by two small extra-parliamentary parties, the Pirate Party of Slovenia (PSS) and the Young People's Party/European Green Party (SMS-Zeleni). Her rival Anže Logar, a former foreign minister in Janez Janša's government, who had the backing of the centre-right opposition Slovenian Democratic Party (SDS) and New Slovenia (NSi), won 46% of the vote. Although fewer voters voted for Pirc Musar in the first round than for Logar, she won in the second round thanks to the support of the Freedom Movement (GS) and the Social Democrats (SD), the two parties which have led the left-green governing coalition since they won the parliamentary elections earlier this year. Turnout in the second round was 53%, 2% up on the first round. Pirc Musar will be sworn in on 22 December; she will be the fifth president in the history of independent Slovenia, and the first woman to hold the post.

Commentary

- The election results show how polarised Slovenian society is, but at the same time makes clear the predominance of the left-liberal camp, concentrated in the larger cities, over the right-wing conservative camp, which is more strongly represented in the rural areas of northern and eastern Slovenia. The results did not come as a surprise, as most polls after the first round predicted that Pirc Musar, who got 28% of the vote on 23 October, would beat the centre-right candidate in the second round thanks to the votes of the left and liberal electorate. Logar's result in the first round (33% of the vote) shows stable support for the opposition, which is centred around former PM Janša and the SDS party.
- Pirc Musar's victory can be seen as a relative success for Robert Golob's green-left cabinet, which was formed in May. Although the candidates supported by the parties in the ruling coalition (Milan Brglez (GS, SD) and Miha Kordiš (Left)) got much lower results in the first round (15% and 2% respectively), and the Left (the third party in the coalition) did not officially support any of the candidates in the second round, Pirc Musar's views do not differ greatly from the government's programme. During the election campaign, she emphasised ecological and social issues, promised to cooperate with NGOs and civic activists in the field of human rights, and that she would work towards maintaining the high standard of living in the country. That is why the two big coalition parties (GS and SD) unreservedly supported her even though she distanced herself from them. Pirc

Musar has made a name for herself as a lawyer (she has represented Melania Trump, among others), and in the past she served as the national commissioner for access to public information, and later as the president of the Slovenian Red Cross.

- The victory for Pirc Musar shows that the Slovenian electorate's tendency, which has been clear since its independence in 1991, to give the office of president to politicians with broadly liberal and left-wing views has continued (she was supported by Milan Kučan and Danilo Türk, two former Slovenian presidents with liberal and left-wing backgrounds). Together with the success of GS (led by Robert Golob) in this year's parliamentary elections, Pirc Musar's victory is proof that the Slovenian electorate is willing to lend credence to new groupings and politicians.
- In Slovenia, the president is treated as an arbiter and supra-party authority, but they lack real instruments of power. Despite the universal nature of presidential elections, the constitution limits the head of state's powers to representative and protocol functions. The president does not have the power to dissolve parliament or veto laws, or to propose legislation; their management of parliamentary and local government elections is also purely formal. The head of state can put forward candidates for ambassadors, but the government can ignore these proposals, as was often the case in 2020-2, when the Janša government was in 'cohabitation' with the outgoing president Borut Pahor, whose roots lie in the SD.
- The next president of Slovenia will most likely support the left-liberal government's foreign policy course, maintaining a moderate level of aid to Ukraine, and supporting the European integration of the Western Balkans through dialogue with Serbia, while pressing it on issues of the rule of law. In Pirc Musar's campaign, the topic of Ukraine was little mentioned, in contrast to the its stronger emphasis in Logar's campaign. As with Golob's cabinet, Pirc Musar may be less interested in cooperating with Hungary and the V4 countries; she may prefer to focus on EU-wide issues, in particular the EU's green transformation programme.