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Slovakia: President Čaputová will not run for re-election

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President Zuzana Čaputová announced on 20 June that she would not be seeking re-election in the spring 2024 elections. In a statement issued, she said that "from the professional and human point of view" she has had the toughest four years of her life, and cannot find the strength to hold the highest office in the state for another term with full commitment. Talk began that she might not seek re-election after she decided to postpone her decision on the matter from April to a later date. Speculation intensified last week, and liberal media close to Čaputová were still attempting to get her to change her mind, urging her "not to deprive people of hope". Čaputová currently heads the list of public trust for political leaders (43% of responders have a positive opinion of her, although she also has 50% negative opinions).

Commentary

- Čaputova's decision is probably related to the extremely harsh attacks levelled at her particularly from the extreme right and Robert Fico's Smer party. For example, at one of the large meetings attended by the latter, the left-wing party's leaders incited the crowd to chant vulgar slogans against the president, and the grouping has regularly referred to her as a "puppet controlled by the US embassy". Čaputová complained that as a result she had received numerous letters with threats directed at her and her family. She also resented the tabloid interest in her daughters' lives. At the same time, the European media (including *Politico*) had been speculating for several months that the Slovak leader's name was on the long list of candidates for the post of Secretary General of NATO. However, Čaputová has little chance of being elected, and has not declared any such ambitions. Nevertheless, a career in international organisations now seems the most likely future for her.
- In next year's presidential election, the former foreign minister and ambassador to Washington Ivan Korčok and the scientist and entrepreneur Robert Mistrík are likely to compete for the support of Čaputová's electorate. Prior to the first round of the 2019 presidential election, Mistrík withdrew from the race under an agreement with Čaputová in order not to split the votes of similar groups of voters. Both candidates are non-partisan, and could count on support from the supporters of the fragmented centre-right and liberal camp. The name of conservative Christian Democrat (KDH) MEP Miriam Lexmann, known for her participation in pro-Atlantic initiatives in the European Parliament, has also been raised in the media in the context of the upcoming election.
- Fico, the former prime minister and the leader of Smer – the party leading the polls ahead of the parliamentary elections scheduled for 30 September – may represent the left in

the next presidential election. This would be a natural decision for him to take, both if his party is not included in a future governing coalition, and if it goes into a coalition with the centre-left Hlas party. Hlas's leader Peter Pellegrini is distancing himself from Fico in the current campaign, calling him a politician who has been continually embroiled in scandals and whom a large part of the electorate would find hard to accept. Nevertheless, a compromise between the two cannot be ruled out; for example, Pellegrini could become prime minister and Fico would not go into government, but stand as the left's candidate for president. Another individual whom this camp could put forward for the post of head of state is Ján Kubiš; he was foreign minister in Fico's first cabinet (2006–9), and has also served as Secretary General of the OSCE and Executive Secretary of UNECE, one of the UN's regional commissions.