

Slovenia's political boomerang: Janez Janša 4.0

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On 22 May, Slovenia's parliament approved the appointment of Janez Janša as prime minister, marking the fourth time that the leader of the conservative Slovenian Democratic Party (SDS) has taken office as head of government. Although the SDS finished second in the March parliamentary election (see *'Parliamentary elections in Slovenia: a close result with a slight advantage for the Freedom Movement'*), Janša succeeded in forming a minority government, which is expected to be sworn in during the first half of June. The cabinet will also include the Christian democratic alliance NSi–SLS–FOKUS and the centre-right Democrats. In the 90-seat National Assembly, the government will control 43 seats. To secure the votes needed to pass key legislation, it is expected to rely on support from the populist Resni.ca party, which will remain outside the cabinet, as well as from the representatives of the Hungarian and Italian national minorities.

Coalition negotiations took place in a tense political atmosphere. The formerly governing liberal-left Freedom Movement accused Janša of cooperating with a private Israeli intelligence firm, which allegedly supplied manipulated recordings intended to undermine the former government of Robert Golob ahead of the March election. In response, the opposition submitted two motions to the Constitutional Court challenging the validity of the electoral process. At the same time, President Nataša Pirc Musar, following consultations with political parties, declined to nominate a candidate for prime minister, arguing that there was no realistic prospect of forming a stable government. However, 43 deputies from the new governing bloc used a constitutional mechanism allowing a group of MPs to nominate a candidate directly.

Given its minority status and the number of parties and political actors involved, Janša's government is likely to face limited stability, making it more difficult to implement a broad reform agenda. In foreign policy, Ljubljana will probably shift towards a more pro-Israeli position, although it was previously one of the EU's leading critics of the Israeli government. At the same time, the new cabinet is expected to continue supporting Ukraine.

Commentary

- **The new coalition has adopted a pro-market, deregulatory economic programme**, distinguishing itself from the more interventionist approach of its predecessors. Its proposals include abolishing the top personal income tax rate of 50% and introducing tax breaks for young workers and small businesses. The coalition also intends to simplify procedures for obtaining building permits, including for projects located near environmentally protected areas. However, attempts to loosen environmental regulations

excessively could provoke public resistance, as environmental protection is a key element of Slovenian national identity. The SDS experienced this firsthand in 2022, when it lost the parliamentary election partly as a result of criticism directed at legislation proposed by Janša's third government (2020–2022) which was widely perceived as weakening environmental safeguards.

- **Janša's government plans to curb the influence of civil society.** The coalition intends to end direct public funding for NGOs and replace it with a system based entirely on voluntary tax allocations. For months, the prime minister has argued that 'left-wing' organisations receive excessive state support. At the same time, it was NGOs that exposed Janša's controversial meetings with representatives of the private Israeli intelligence firm allegedly involved in efforts to discredit the previous government. The coalition's plans to restrict the right to strike are also likely to further weaken civil society. In addition, the government has announced a reform of public television, although it has not yet provided details, fuelling opposition concerns that it may seek to place the broadcaster under political control. During his previous terms in office, Janša repeatedly attempted to influence the media, drawing comparisons with the approach adopted at the time by Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán (see *'Drugi Orbán? Słowenia pod rządami Janšy'*).
- **Janša is likely to work towards rebuilding close ties with Israel.** The previous government led by Robert Golob supported the Palestinian cause, recognised Palestinian statehood in 2024 and was among the EU's strongest critics of the Israeli government (see *'Slovenia in the vanguard of of Europe's criticism of Israel'*). By contrast, Janša has repeatedly signalled that his administration will adopt a more pro-Israeli position. He has also attended two conferences organised by the Israeli government on combating antisemitism. These events brought together numerous representatives of the European and global populist right and were widely perceived as carrying a strong anti-Muslim message (see *'What counts is the present: Israel's alliance with the European right'*). Reports of Janša's alleged cooperation with a private Israeli intelligence agency, together with the warm congratulations he received from Benjamin Netanyahu after becoming prime minister, further suggest that Slovenia is likely to move closer to Israel under the new government.
- **The prime minister has promised a more active policy in support of Ukraine.** While Robert Golob's government was broadly sympathetic towards Kyiv, it adopted a more cautious approach in practice. Janša, by contrast, openly supports Ukraine's accession to the EU, as well as future EU membership for the Western Balkan states. At the same time, his credibility on this issue is undermined by cooperation with the Resni.ca party, whose members maintained contacts with a Russian diplomat expelled from Slovenia in 2024. Further doubts stem from statements by the party's leader, Zoran Stevanović, who was elected speaker of parliament with the support of the new coalition and has announced plans to visit Moscow in the near future.
- **Janša wants Slovenia to increase defence spending in line with NATO's target of reaching 5% of GDP by 2035.** He has criticised the previous government's plan to increase spending to only 3% by 2030 as insufficient. At the same time, pushing through higher military expenditure could prove difficult for the minority government and may

require support from the opposition. The Resni.ca party, which supports the coalition, questions Slovenia's NATO membership and is unlikely to support a significant increase in defence spending.