

The 2010 Parliamentary Elections in Slovakia: End of the Leftist-Nationalist Government?

Ivo Samson

- *Social Democrats won overwhelmingly but were left without coalition partners;*
- *After four years, return to centre-right coalition probable. In the limelight of TV cameras on Sunday, June 13, all four leaders of centre-right parties pledged not to negotiate with the left on composing the new government.*
- *Both Christian Democrat parties kept their positions. There were unexpectedly high outcomes – 12,4% for the new liberal party Freedom and Solidarity (SaS).*
- *Traditional Hungarian voters split: after 12 years, the Party of Hungarian Coalition (SMK) leaves the Parliament remaining with 4,33 % under the 5% threshold. A new Slovak-Hungarian "hybrid" party - Most-Híd (Bridge) enters the Parliament with 8% support.*
- *Party of the "father-founder" of independent Slovak Republic after the split of Czechoslovakia was ousted from the Parliament winning only 4,32%.*
- *A centre-right coalition of two Christian Democratic Parties, the Freedom and Solidarity party, and of the Most-Híd party is very probable outcome of the elections.*
- *Decreasing public debt, increasing employment, returning Slovakia into "economic tiger" once more are the most important tasks for the new government coalition according to Iveta Radičová, chairwoman of the strongest centre-right party – the Slovak Christian and Democratic Union (SDKÚ).*

The Slovak elections in facts and figures

The elections results of June 12 elections produced only some slight surprises including the relatively high election turnout of 58,83% as compared to 55% in 2006. The united modern Slovak left represented by the de-facto post-communist party SMER-Social Democracy (SMER-SD) won by far the highest number of votes – 34,78%, which is almost 6% more than in 2006 and gained 62 seats in the 150-seat National Council of the Slovak Republic.

The Slovak Christian and Democratic Union (SDKÚ) collected 15,4% of votes (about 3% less than in 2006) and will have 26 seats in the new Parliament.

The liberal newcomer to the political scene – the Freedom and Solidarity party (SaS) gained 12,4% of votes and 22 seats, respectively.

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The Christian Democratic Movement (KDH), the second Christian Democratic party was able to preserve its 2006 support with 8,52% of votes and 15 seats in the next Parliament, followed by the new Slovak-Hungarian "hybrid" party Most-Híd with 8,12% of votes and 14 seats.

The new party Most-Híd of the former Hungarian leader Bela Bugár reached 8,12% of votes and gained 14 seats in the Parliament.

The virulently nationalist Slovak National Party – SNS lost more than 50% of its 2006 electorate and will join the next Parliament with only 9 seats after collecting a meager 5,07% of votes nearly missing the 5% threshold.

Two parliamentary parties – Party of the Hungarian Coalition (SMK) and Movement for Democratic Slovakia (HZDS) of the once hegemonic Slovak political leader Vladimír Mečiar did not reach the 5% necessary for entering the Parliament. Their election support declined to 5,33% (SMK) and 5,32% (HZDS).

According to election calculations, the government leftist-nationalist camp will lose the parliamentary majority enjoying only 71 seats compared to 79 seats for the four centre-right parties.

Pyrrhic victory for Social Democrats

The SMER-SD won the elections clearly and gathered almost 6% more votes than in previous 2006 elections. In this way, the PM Robert Fico was able to win the battle in promoting his party but he lost the war on saving his government. It is obvious that the SMER-SD was successful in increasing its popularity only at the expense of the two coalition partners – SNS and HZDS. During the 2006-2010 government coalition term, Robert Fico cleverly succeeded in blaming his government partners – especially the SNS – for a series of corruption and clientelist scandals. In this way, in the eyes of SMER-SD supporters, their party remained "clean" and the 2010 election achievements of SMER-SD are quite remarkable. The party could utilize the "all against one" pre-election stereotypes, when all opposition parties attacked SMER-SD and had refused any post-elections cooperation with it in advance.

In spite of economic crisis, rising public debt, increasing unemployment and a failure to meet the promise of creating a social state, the party of the PM R. Fico has appeared strong enough to challenge any new government.

Christian Democrats: SDKÚ and KDH

Both parties are very transparent and legible and if they enter the government as coalition partners, their behavior will be probably very predictable. Their leaders - Iveta Radičová (SDKÚ) and Ján Figel' (KDH) are respected as non-populist and non-confrontational politicians. However, already today one can see some future frictions between both parties. SDKÚ is less a Christian than a secular party and KDH has been often accused of Christian fundamentalism. Above this, both parties are keenly observed from Brussels. I. Radičová conducted the election campaign by rejecting any financial help of Slovakia to Greece, Ján Figel' – as former EU Commissioner – has strongly defended the intra-EU solidarity with Greece.

Last not least, it was just the KDH, which left the SDKÚ-led government coalition in 2006 because of the negative attitude of SDKÚ to an agreement with Vatican.

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Theoretically, R. Fico still has a chance to form a government, if the centre-right parties fail to reach an agreement on the post-election cooperation. The SMER-SD leader, however, admitted the difficulty of his position: "we will not beg to anyone, we have our values", he announced just one day after the elections.

Losers of the elections: HZDS, SMK and SNS

The reasons for catastrophic results of HZDS and SMK are quite obvious. The strong man of HZDS – V. Mečiar was gradually losing credibility for many years. He has never been able to clarify corruption scandals and/or to explain the financing of his own entrepreneurial activities and the gain of his personal wealth. His ousting from the Parliament was expected by some observers.

On the other hand, the failure of SMK to enter the Parliament comes as surprise. Despite the split of the Hungarian electorate into two parties, one expected that the rural Hungarian population in the south will remain loyal to the "pure" Hungarian SMK. Instead of this, the Hungarian voters seem to have become disoriented and – surprisingly – might have lost interest in election participation.

On the contrary, the poor results of SNS were expected. The most powerful weapon of this party – the Hungarian card – had been taken away from it by the SMER-SD party. More than this, corruption scandals in the SNS-led ministries, luxurious life and aggressive public alcoholism of the SNS leader Ján Slota undoubtedly estranged many previous SNS voters.

Reactions of the three losers were different. The SMK head Pál Csáky and the whole leadership of the party drew personal consequences and resigned. On the other hand, the leaders of HZDS and SNS did not accept the defeat as personal debacle, but as a debacle of Slovakia. "The HZDS has not lost, it is the loss of Slovakia", the HZDS leadership announced. The response of Ján Slota was similar. "It is an unambiguous defeat for Slovakia" he said and added that now "Hungarians and homosexuals will rule Slovakia".

New stars at the political scene: SaS and Most-Híd

The SaS is regarded as the real winner of the elections but at the same time, most domestic observers point out the unclear orientation of this party. SaS and its leader Richard Sulík represent a mix of economic neo-liberalism, right-wing populism and even libertarian philosophy – the party defends the rights of gays and lesbians for registered partnerships and demands the legalization of marijuana.

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Forming the new government and its most important tasks

Although the chances for SMER-SD to form a new government are seen as very modest, at a press conference early on Sunday afternoon on 13 June, President Ivan Gašparovič said he would first ask the SMER-SD to form a government, telling it was a "moral" duty to do.

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The new coalition will have to propose rigid economic reforms and a tough budgetary discipline. Reforms in healthcare and in school system are seen as further priorities. The new government will have to offer a plausible anti-corruption strategy both to the Slovak public and to foreign investors.

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Especially the financial contribution of Slovakia to Greece in the amount of 870 million euros the PM R. Fico already promised in Brussels can develop into a real stumbling block within the would-be new coalition. Another problem – combining Christian Democratic values with liberal ideas – might present a serious problem in elaborating a new Government Manifesto.

Regardless of this, Slovakia has followed the wide-spread right-wing election trend in the Visegrad countries – after Hungary and the Czech Republic in 2010.



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The European Policy Initiative (EuPI) aims at stimulating and assisting new Member States from CEE to develop capacity for constructive co-authorship of common European policies at both government and civil society level. As a new priority area of the European Policies and Civic Participation Program of Open Society Institute – Sofia, EuPI will contribute to improving the capacity of new Member States to effectively impact common European policies through quality research, policy recommendations, networking and advocacy. The initiative operates in the ten new Member States from CEE through a network of experts and policy institutes.

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