






Weekly Briefing

**Slovenia Political briefing:
2017 presidential elections
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The most outstanding event in the domestic political sphere recently was the 2017 presidential elections. Voters were electing the president for the sixth presidential mandate since the proclamation of Slovenian independence. None of the candidates got a majority of votes in the first round, so the second round was called on November 12 and the run-off was won by the incumbent president, Mr. Borut Pahor.

1) History and background

By its constitution, Slovenia is a parliamentary republic, making the president a largely ceremonial role, a representative of the country in foreign relations, and the chief commander of the Slovenian Army. According to the Slovenian constitution, he also:

- »calls elections to the National Assembly;
- promulgates laws;
- appoints state officials where provided by law;
- appoints and recalls ambassadors and envoys of the Republic, and accepts the letters of credence of foreign diplomatic representatives;
- issues instruments of ratification;
- decides on the granting of clemency;
- confers decorations and honorary titles« (Constitution of the Republic of Slovenia)

The position itself was established in the December 1991 constitution, thereby making the incumbent »president of the presidency« (in the terminology of the previous Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia), Milan Kučan, also *de iure* the first Slovenian president. One of the reasons for the limits imposed to the role of the president at that time was also the continuity of Kučan with the previous Communist League of Slovenia, which was seen as a liability by the largely right-wing coalition which had the parliamentary majority and formed the government at that time. The debate about the fairly limited role of the

president is ongoing ever since and has before these elections, again become a topic of the election campaign. Between 1991 and 2017, Slovenia had four presidents, serving a total of 5 mandates. The first president, Milan Kučan (b. 1941), served the first term between December 1992 and November 1997, and the second term between November 1997 and December 2002. He was replaced by Janez Drnovšek (b. 1950–d. 2008), previously the prime minister of Slovenia between 1992 and 2002 (with a short break in 2000). Drnovšek was elected president in 2002 and served one term. He was followed by Danilo Türk (b.1952), who was a president until 2007, and ran for presidency again in 2007, when the incumbent president, Borut Pahor, was then elected.

The 1991 constitutional and 1992 legal regulation of presidential elections still determine the role of president today, the system of electing the president also remaining unchanged. The president in Slovenia is elected for five years and he/she can serve a maximum of two terms. He/she is elected by a public vote and can run for presidency after previously obtaining support/signatures of either (a) ten members of the Parliament, (b) one or more political parties *and* either three Parliament members or 3000 voters' signatures, or (c) signatures of 5000 voters.

2) 2017 Presidential Elections Campaign

The elections were called in August 2017 and the campaign officially started on September 22, a month before elections. In the first round on October 22, there were 9 candidates:

- **Borut Pahor**, the incumbent President of Slovenia, who officially ran as an independent candidate but with the support of the left wing political party of Social Democrats (SD) he was the president of until 2012, and the Democratic Party of Pensioners of Slovenia (DeSUS).
- **Marjan Šarec**, the mayor of Kamnik (small town 23 km from Ljubljana), candidate of his own (local) political party Marjan Šarec List (LMŠ).

- **Romana Tomc**, candidate of the right wing Slovenian Democratic Party (SDS), Member of European Parliament (European People's Party)
- **Ljudmila Novak**, president of the Christian right wing New Slovenia party (NSi)
- **Andrej Šiško**, candidate of the nationalist right wing party United Slovenia (ZSi)
- **Boris Popovič**, mayor of the coastal town Koper, candidate of his own (local) political party Slovenia Forever
- **Maja Makovec Brenčič**, Minister of Education, candidate of the leading party in 2014– government, the Modern Centre Party (SMC)
- **Suzana Lara Krause**, candidate of the right wing Slovenian People's Party (SLS)
- **Angelca Likovič**, candidate of the Christian right-wing Voice for Children and Families party

The candidates thus came from very different backgrounds, and the strategies to win the support also varied.

Borut Pahor, officially an independent candidate, had the candidacy support of his own party and another governmental party, but was seen in media as an unofficial candidate or a safe option for two other biggest political parties, the government leading Modern Centre Party (SMC) and the main opposition Slovenian Democratic Party (SDS). These speculations were further encouraged by the fact that the two biggest parties failed to put forward their own candidates until fairly late into the campaign. Maja Makovec Brenčič presented her candidature only a month before elections (the last days before the campaign started) and Romana Tomc even only two weeks before elections. Even after the candidatures of Makovec Brenčič and Tomc were presented, the two political parties did not exert a lot of public support for them. The common media interpretation was that the two parties' real candidate was the incumbent president Pahor, but as the biggest two parties they could not risk not to present

their own candidates. The political position and support of Pahor was repeatedly questioned. He was interpreted in media as an opportunist president, refusing to take a left-right stand in order to win support from the both sides. This was usually related also to his largely failed »national reconciliation« project, by which he wanted to promote the reconciliation of the two WWII sides, the resistance movement side and the side of the collaboration factions.

On the left side of the political spectrum, there was a lack of candidates, Social Democrats supporting Pahor, the only other left-wing party in the parliament, The Left (previously United Left), did not put forward a presidential candidature. On the right wing side the situation was more complex. In the last years there were growing conflicts between two main right wing parties, SDS and New Slovenia (NSi). The late candidature of the SDS candidate Romana Tomc was therefore seen also as prevention measure for the SDS voters not to support the candidate of the competitive NSi party, whose support was initially growing. The third candidate of the prominent political right wing parties, Suzana Lara Krause, was supported by SLS which failed to enter the parliament in 2014 and her candidature was seen as an attempt to revive the political credibility of this political party before parliamentary elections, scheduled for early summer 2018.

The left-right distinctions were largely bypassed by the two candidates that presented their candidature on the background of their success in local politics. Both mayors of smaller towns, Marjan Šarec, mayor of Kamnik (approx 30.000 inhabitants) and Boris Popovič, mayor of Koper (approx. 51.000 inhabitants) were presenting themselves as an alternative to state-level politics and referred to their operative success (successful projects etc.) on the level of their municipalities. The paradigm of mayors running for state functions with the credibility of successful local »managers« of course is not new. Popovič has previously ran in the parliamentary elections in 2004 with his own political party »Slovenia is ours«, but failed to enter parliament. The biggest success of the kind, however, was the candidature of Ljubljana mayor Zoran Jankovič with his

political party Positive Slovenia which won the 2011 parliamentary elections with as much as 28,51 % of the votes, but then Janković failed to construct a government and gradually retreated from state politics after his political party could not enter parliament in the 2014 elections.

The last two candidates came from right-wing populist backgrounds. Andrej Šiško, the leader of the extreme right nationalist party from Slovenian North-East and the head of Hervardi nationalist faction, provoked a lot of public debate with his candidature, especially being previously charged for a murder attempt. The candidature of Angelca Likovič, on the other hand, was an outcome of a populist right-wing movement which started with the campaign for traditional family values and against same-sex couples' rights before a referendum about a new family legislation in December 2015.

3) Outcome and results

In the first round of elections, after a comparatively quiet campaign, the turnout was also fairly low, 44,22 % (almost 5% lower than the previous presidential elections). None of the candidates got a majority of votes, so the two leading candidates, Borut Pahor (47,21 %) and Marjan Šarec (24,76 %), qualified for the second round of elections. Others got considerably smaller outcomes, the two right-wing candidates, Romana Tomc (13,68 %) and Ljudmila Novak (7,24 %) were the third and the fourth. The extreme nationalist Šiško got 2,21 %, which despite the relatively small number was still seen as a potentially alarming result. Other four candidates got less than 2% of votes each (Popovič 1,80 %, Makovec Brenčič 1,74 %, Krause 0,78 % and Likovič 0,59%).

The second round followed on November 12 and before that, the media and opinion polls alike were quite careful to speculate about the outcome, because the predicted result was very even. Eventually, according to (as of November 13) still unofficial results, Pahor eventually won with a slight majority of 52,94 % over Šarec's 47,06 %.