



Weekly Briefing

Slovakia Political briefing:
Domestic Political Developments in 2018
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Outlook for 2018: Slovak Domestic Political Developments

New political parties

In January a new political party Spolu (Together) and a new political movement Progresívne Slovensko (Progressive Slovakia) have been registered by the Ministry of Interior, which allows them to nominate their own candidates into election. These new bodies have a chance to attract voters who are tired of the parties currently represented in the National Council, as there is a growing number in the population not willing to vote for parties or politicians publicly active since the early 1990s. In this regard, the Progressive Slovakia movement has a potential to attract these voters as their members have other than a political background. However, the diversity of its members could be a disadvantage as they come from both sides of the political spectrum (social and conservative), as well as from the liberal center. In this regard, their program and priorities will be of a great importance to help potential voters to decide. Currently, the members of the movement organize discussions all around the country and present their visions for the future. The first opinion poll, in which Progressive Slovakia was included, published in January a forecasted of 1,9% of votes from the asked people. The growth is expected in the upcoming months.

The other political party Together has a more complicated position. It was formed by current members of the parliament not representing any of the parliamentary parties since the time they left those they were elected for in the previous election. The fact that the leader of the party Mr. Beblavy has joined several political parties within the recent years could be discouraging for voters who look for new faces.

Disputes between the President and the Government

The year has started with a dispute between President Kiska and the Government, this time the Minister of Interior Kalinak who raised issues

regarding the President's official visit to Mexico and his using of the governmental jet. The relationship between the President and the Government is strained since the beginning - since President Kiska has defeated Prime Minister Fico in the presidential election. In addition, current president had no political experience before being elected and has become a critique of the government, especially due to many corruption crises involving members of the SMER party. Moreover, the President together with his advisors is seen as pro-American and pro-European and strongly anti-Russian and also anti-Chinese (the President has met with Dalai Lama during his visit to Slovakia). His views and positions polarize also the society- there are groups supporting the President unconditionally and groups strongly criticizing him, which only reflects the current polarization of the Slovak society.

In addition, there is the investigation into the President's former company for tax evasions and also the issue around the troubled financing of the presidential campaign. The President has openly blamed the Minister of Interior for his interventions into the investigation.

However, looking back at those times when the Prime Minister launched a wave of criticism of the President, the result has always backfired and turned against the Prime Minister himself. Therefore, many political commentators in Slovakia warn the Prime Minister not to enter into further disputes, which can cost him losing support as the President remains the most trustworthy politician in the country based on several opinion polls.

Concerning the President himself, Slovakia is expecting his announcement related to the next year's presidential election and his decision to run again or not. He had said several times that due to family reasons he will not be running, but recent attacks by the governmental representatives can lead to different announcement.

Municipal election

The municipal election will take place in November. People will be voting for representatives in the local assemblies, as well as for village and city mayors all around the country.

Traditionally, parties on the local level form coalitions that are not in accordance with the ruling coalition, but reflect more the local state of relations among different parties' members.

As for the expected conduct and results of election, the ruling SMER party still has its strongholds, especially among the elderly population living in villages. The other coalition parties may succeed too, but probably in local-coalitions with others.

In general, the local elections are expected to prove the lasting trend of low trust of the electorate towards existing and well-established parties. Based on the results from regional election, the candidates with no party affiliation have a chance to succeed and be elected, but also members of opposition parties might be successful.

The two new political subjects, Together and Progressive Slovakia will be closely watched during these elections, as their performance would be crucial for the parliamentary election scheduled for 2020.

More anti-corruption protests?

The possibility of more protests organized by students cannot be excluded from the expected events in 2018. Even though a meeting between the Director of Anti-Corruption Department at the Office of Government and representatives of students has been announced in late November, no information has appeared at whether it had taken place as was planned in mid-December 2017. The arrogance of the Government and the Prime Minister towards civic activities is shown in supporting information about a disputable financing of the protests and the actual political affiliation of supporters would be some of the reasons. Moreover, there are still demands from students that have not been met. We can

expect that with a change of the weather more protests will be organized around Slovakia.

In addition, last year's students have talked about organizing a students' strike as a stronger form of pressure against the Government.

Stability of the coalition

Over the course of the year the re-appearing of disagreements in the coalition cannot be ruled out. There are several topics the coalition parties' have different position to. The support of the Istanbul Convention is one example, with the Minister of Justice Zitnanska (nominee of Most-Híd/Bridge) supporting the international document and all the other members are against it. This issue will probably not threaten the coalition, but the differences between the more liberal and open-minded members and the more conservative ones will remain.

Anti-extremist campaigns

Different non-governmental organizations, together with different initiatives supported by the Government, are taking action against the growing extremist tendencies among the young population. From the polls conducted among youngsters, the Slovak society is affected by the same trend as the European society, that is the growing criticism of liberal democracy and growing admiration for more authoritarian regimes.

The discussion is ongoing in Slovak society since the election of Kotleba as the Chairman of the Banska Bystrica administrative region in 2013 and the election of his party into the National Council in 2016. Opinion polls show a lasting support for his party, it is around 8%. The more radical opinions are associated with the lack of trust of young people towards the so-called standard politicians – those who have been appearing in positions of power for the last 25 years. Moreover, the country faces other challenges in the field of economy: lack of qualified labor on one hand, and unemployed youngsters, especially in central and eastern part of the country, on the other hand. This is reflected in the

lack of coordination between the market and the education system that has been present in the country for many years. Even though the economy is growing in macro terms, the people are skeptical on the individual level. Moreover, suspicions towards the membership in the EU and NATO are growing due to the increasing number of different conspiracy websites and Facebook pages young people follow.

Moreover, the year 2018 is a year full of anniversaries, 1 January marked the 25th anniversary of the split of Czechoslovakia, and in October it will be 100 years since the creation of the first Czechoslovak Republic. For this occasion, Slovakia and Czechia are preparing a series of events at different levels. In August, it will be 60 years since the troops of the Warsaw Pact entered the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic.