



Weekly Briefing

Slovenia Political briefing:
Government coalition negotiations and splits within the political
parties
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Government coalition negotiations and splits within the political parties

Summary

Following the June 3 parliamentary elections, the negotiations began for the new government coalition. Despite the considerable percentage of votes that were given to Slovenian Democratic Party (SDS) of Janez Janša, it seems unlikely so far that he could reach the necessary majority over 46 votes in the 90 member parliament to assemble the government. The president of the second placed Marjan Šarec List (LMSŠ) party started the coalition negotiations on his own, and the coalition with him as prime minister is slightly more feasible. As of now, however, he does not seem to have the necessary 46 votes either. The situation is further complicated by the recent developments in two of the political parties, an expulsion of Milan Brglez from Modern Centre Party (SMC) and the apparent split in the New Slovenia (NSi).

Background: Election results

Elections for the Slovenian Parliament (National Assembly) were held on June the 3rd 2018, approximately a month before the regular elections would have been due, due to the resignation of the Prime Minister Miro Cerar and the subsequent stepping down of the government.

The turnout on the elections was fairly low, only slightly surpassing 50%. The results of the elections were quite accurately predicted by the polls in the two weeks before the elections, although probably the biggest surprise was the number of smaller parties that went over the parliamentary threshold of 4%. Out of the nine political parties that entered the parliament, three parties were just slightly over the threshold. Alenka Bratušek Party of former Prime Minister Alenka Bratušek got 5, 11%; Pensioners Party DeSUS of the current Minister of Foreign Affairs Karel Erjavec got 4, 93% and the extreme right Slovenian National Party (SNS) of Zmago Jelinčič got 4, 17%. The three small parties

together have 14 seats in the parliament. The rest of the votes were split as well, and after the winning Slovenian Democratic Party with 24, 92% and the second placed Marjan Šarec Party (LMŠ) with 12, 60%, there is another group of three parties with very close results around 9%: Social Democrats (9, 93%), Modern Centre Party SMC (9, 75%) and The Left (9, 33%). This group got 10, 10 and 9 parliamentary seats respectively. Despite the recent changes in leadership, the Christian right wing New Slovenia Party (NSi) got a predictable share of 7, 16%, which make up 7 seats in the parliament.

Coalition negotiations

Although the Slovenian Democratic Party won the elections, its far right wing agenda and program along with the previous negative experience some of the political parties had with the SDS president Janša and the accusations he made in the campaign, makes it difficult for them to form alliances. Several parties were even openly stating that they would not enter a coalition with Slovenian Democrats. The remaining few political parties that Janša can hypothetically choose from, are New Slovenia Party (NSi) and Slovenian National Party (SNS). With 7 votes of NSi and 4 votes of SNS, and together with 25 votes of SDS, this right wing coalition still falls short of the desired 46, having only 36 votes support plus potentially 2 votes of the national minorities. Being aware of this and probably waiting to see the other coalition attempts fail first, the Slovenian Democratic Party president Janez Janša has still not started the coalition negotiations.

The scope of the alternative coalition which is already being negotiated on the initiative of the LMŠ president Marjan Šarec is still unclear as well. Initially, the group he started the talks with, was wide in media the group was called a »left-centre coalition«, which meant that it was meant to include central and left wing parties, namely all the parties except for the three right wing parties. Few weeks later regular negotiations are only being held among the six parties, which are tending more towards the central part of the political spectrum, main

parties being Marjan Šarec List, Social Democrats, Modern Centre Party, Alenka Bratušek Party, DeSUS. The sixth party in the group, however, changed. The Left, which was initially part of the negotiations, was gradually excluded from the negotiations, from the views which were more difficult to reconcile with the other countries. The Left itself expressed skepticism about the liberal views on economy which were becoming more prominent in the coalition negotiations, especially the lowering of the profit tax. The other potential coalition partners saw some positions of The Left unacceptable, for example, their demand to have a referendum on NATO membership. Five centre and left wing political parties, without The Left, together only have 43 votes, which are not enough, even if the 2 ethnic minority votes support it. In order to have a majority they need another political party to join, and the talks now are being held with New Slovenia Party, which means that the coalition would be wider in political spectrum. Members of the New Slovenia Party have expressed more sympathies for the Janša right wing coalition, but they did not exclude the option of joining Šarec coalition as well.

The President of Slovenia, Borut Pahor, initially expressed his attempt to offer the government mandate to the relative winner of the elections, Slovenian Democratic Party President Janša. He however, conducted a round of talks with the representatives of the newly elected parliamentary political parties first. In these, he was asked by the head of the parliamentary group of the Marjan Šarec List, Brane Golubovič, to wait until Friday, the 6th of July, before he gives the mandate. On the 6th of July, Marjan Šarec announced that he still has not got the guarantee for the 46 votes' majority. Most probably this was due to the reluctance of the New Slovenia (NSi) to openly join the coalition before they get the chance to join a right wing coalition first.

Disagreements within two parliamentary parties

On the 26th of June, the former Speaker of the National Assembly Milan Brglez, Vice president of the Modern Centre Party, announced that he had been

expelled from the party on the meeting of the SMC Executive Board previously the same day. The reason given by the SMC leadership was that Brglez failed to respect the party decisions. The disagreements between the president and the vice president of SMC, Miro Cerar and Milan Brglez, went back to the January 2017 vote on the new immigration law, where Brglez went against the Cerar position of more strict immigration policies, advocating for the human rights principles of the Constitution. The reasons for the final expulsion were speculated to be two-fold. Brglez himself hinted at the reasons for his expulsion to be that he disagreed with a more pragmatic coalition policy of party president Cerar who might agree on joining a coalition with right wing parties, despite initially promising in the campaign not to do that. The other reason was a fight over the candidacy for the Speaker of the National Assembly, where both Cerar and Brglez submitted their candidatures. After the expulsion, Brglez remains a non-party allied member of the parliament, but might not support the government coalition along with SMC, which makes their group and the potential coalitions one vote weaker.

The other rather unexpected intervention was made by the former head of the New Slovenia Party and elected NSi member of the parliament, Ljudmila Novak. On the 6th of July, she made an official statement for Slovenian media, announcing that in case the president gives the mandate to Janša, she will not give a vote of support for him as the Prime Minister in the parliament vote. After a long history of harsh public discreditation Janša addressed to her in the previous years, she was known to try to move the right wing New Slovenia further away from being a Slovenian Democratic Party satellite party and to give it a more independent political profile. The replacement of her as party president by Matej Tonin in February 2018 was seen by many as a move of coming closer towards the Janša SDS party again before parliamentary elections. She also made an appeal to her political party to reconsider joining the Šarec coalition, despite its politically varied profile.

Despite these being individual events, they might also hint at wider disagreements within the two political parties, Modern Centre Party and New Slovenia Party. Individuals closer to Brglez or Novak than to the mainstream or the leadership of the two parties might play a crucial role in the composition of either of the two possible government coalitions.

Conclusion

A month after the parliamentary elections, the outcome of the government coalition negotiations is still unclear. Due to second placed Marjan Šarec not being able to present the guaranteed 46 votes coalition agreement, most probably the President Borut Pahor will give the mandate to the relative winner of the elections, Slovenian Democratic Party president Janez Janša. If he fails to convince one of the political centre parties to join, the second chance might be given to Šarec, where the votes of either New Slovenia or The Left will be crucial. In case of this strategy failing as well, repeated elections might ensue.