



Weekly Briefing

Slovenia political briefing:
Briefing on the development in politics in 2018 – Slovenia
Helena Motoh

China-CEE Institute

Kiadó: Kína-KKE Intézet Nonprofit Kft.
Szerkesztésért felelős személy: Chen Xin
Kiadásért felelős személy: Huang Ping

 1052 Budapest Petőfi Sándor utca 11.
 +36 1 5858 690
 office@china-cee.eu
 china-cee.eu

Briefing on the development in politics in 2018 – Slovenia

Election year

Short summary

Slovenian residents participated in two elections in 2018. Parliamentary elections, i.e. elections of the members of national assembly took place in June after the resignation of the previous Prime Minister Miro Cerar. In November, local elections took place, i.e. the elections for the members of municipal council in 212 Slovenian municipalities together with the elections for mayors of these municipalities. The long negotiations that followed the parliamentary elections and the tense process of forming the government marked the bigger part of the political life in Slovenia, only to be followed by the several yet unresolved complicated outcomes of the mayor elections.

Campaign for the parliamentary elections in June

Although the resignation of the Prime Minister Cerar technically made the June 3rd elections for the National Assembly pre-term, the difference was negligible, with enough time had by the political parties to prepare for the campaign. Several main shifts took place in this period. New political parties were established, among them Dobra država (Good state) by a former Modern Centre Party member Bojan Dobovšek; GibanjeSkupajNaprej (Together Forward Movement) by Danijel Bešič Loredan and Za zdravo družbo (Party for Healthy Society). Most of them based their agendas on anti-corruption programs, addressing some of the key issues in Slovenian society (institutional corruption, health care system crisis etc.). A major shift happened in the Catholic right-wing party NSi (New Slovenia Party), where the long-term president Ljudmila Novak was replaced with a younger Matej Tonin, which was seen as a shift towards more cooperation in the right wing of the political spectrum, especially with the main right wing party, Janez Janša's SDS (Slovenian Democratic Party). Several pre-existing parties were revived, e.g. Solidarnost (Solidarity), Pirate Party, and the two right wing parties, which did not qualify for the parliament the previous time, the extreme-right Slovenian National Party (SNS) of Zmago Jelinčič and the conservative Slovenian People's Party (SLS) by Marko Zidanšek.

The main topics, around which the campaign revolved, were mostly related to the problems of the resigned Cerar government or the promises that it failed to fulfill in the last government term. In politics, cases of corruption were especially addressed, with the calls for the political responsibility for several of these. Most notable cases in the campaign were the building of thermal power

plant unit TEŠ 6, a dubious heritage of the previous governments that failed to be addressed. The other big topic was the suspicious financing of the election campaign by the SDS party, where the party was accused of taking illegal loans from dubious sources abroad. In economy, the main issue was the sell-off of the New Bank of Ljubljana (NLB) according to the agreement with European Commission and the related negotiations. In foreign politics, two issues prevailed. The first one was how to solve the issue the Arbitration Court decision, after which Croatia refused to implement the demarcation of the borders between the two countries. The other issue was related to migration, where especially the right-wing and extreme right-wing parties greatly relied on the anti-immigration rhetoric.

June elections and the results

Partly as a surprise, compared to the 2011 and 2014, when the public opinion polls failed to predict the result of the vote, this time the prediction turned out to be fairly accurate, especially for the first few political parties. It was therefore not much of a surprise that the winner, Slovenian Democratic Party (SDS) of Janez Janša, got 24,94%, and Marjan Šarec List (LMŠ) got less than half of that, 12, 65%. Two of the three parties that composed the previous government, left wing Social Democrats (SD) of Dejan Židan and the left-centre Modern Centre Party (SMC) of PM Miro Cerar got a very similar result of 9,93% and 9,75% respectively. The Left (Levica) of Luka Mesec was also a surprise with 9,31%, almost doubling their 2014 result. The Christian right-wing New Slovenia (NSi) only slightly improved their 2014 result with 7,13%. Other three parties which managed to pass the threshold were the party of the former Prime Minister Alenka Bratušek (SAB) with 5,13%, Democratic Pensioners' Party (DeSUS) of Karl Erjavec with 4,92% and the extreme right Slovenian National Party (SNS) of Zmago Jelinčič got 4,19%. In the parliament thus formed, Slovenian Democratic Party got 25 seats, Marjan Šarec List got 13, Social Democrats 10, Modern Centre Party 10, The Left 9, New Slovenia 7, Alenka Bratušek Party and DeSus got 5 each, Slovenian National Party got 4 and the remaining two seats are reserved for the representatives of the Italian and Hungarian minorities. The turnout was low, only slightly over half with 52,09%.

Two aspects were specific for the 2018 Parliamentary elections results. First was a large number of parties, nine, that crossed the threshold into the parliament, making it the most diverse parliament since the 1991 independence. Several of them got around 10 seats, which made the government negotiations reasonably more difficult. The other visible shift was more representation of the ends of political spectrum, The Left and Slovenian National Party getting more seats than was expected, a contrast to the much larger support for more mainstream central parties which prevailed in the previous two elections.

Formation of the government

Despite the big percentage of votes that went to Janša's SDS, mostly due to the political history and attitudes of this party, the formation of the government was very difficult. Three scenarios prevailed at first, a right wing coalition led by Janša (which did not have a guaranteed majority in the parliament); a centre or centre-left coalition led by Marjan Šarec, where the main decision was, whether to include the right wing New Slovenia or The Left; and a »great coalition« led by Janša. In the first phase of negotiations, none of the two leaders, Janša or Šarec could guarantee a parliament majority.

When it became evident that Janša's right wing coalition is unviable, Šarec started the negotiations with the Modern Centre Party (SMC) of Miro Cerar, Social Democrats (SD) of Dejan Židan and Pensioners' Party (DeSUS) of Karel Erjavec, while also including Alenka Bratušek Party (SAB) and the only right wing party in this coalition group, the New Slovenia party (NSi) of Matej Tonin. The disagreements between the former coalition partners (SMC, DeSUS and SD) made the negotiations more difficult, but the main issue which actually brought this scenario to a close, was the refusal of New Slovenia to give up on its liberal economic program, especially in relation to tax cap in income tax, health care privatization and the status of private schools. NSi eventually withdrew from the negotiations in mid July. In the following 14 days the second round of forming a government took place, resulting in accelerated negotiations between Šarec and The Left of Luka Mesec. Compared to those of the New Slovenia, opposite demands were insisted on by The Left, especially their refusal to sell-off the New Bank of Slovenia (NLB) and the limitations on the financing of military. Since a complete agreement could not be reached by the two sides, they eventually settled on minority government coalition with a limited support of The Left. The Left would support Šarec's government by supporting his candidature for the Prime Minister and then joining in in the form of "project cooperation" for the projects that they were consistent with their political program. Marjan Šarec was then confirmed as Prime Minister designate on August 17th and the government team was selected and confirmed in the following weeks.

November local elections

On November 18, 212 Slovenian municipalities performed two election processes, combining the vote for the municipality councils and the district community councils and the vote for mayors of the municipalities. The trends which were predicted according to the experience with previous local elections and the public opinion polls hinted at a disparity with the results of the national parliamentary elections. Most notable difference was a different representation

of the political parties, where traditionally more votes, in particular outside the bigger towns would go to the right-wing of the spectrum. Even more, compared to the party-affiliated lists and mayor candidates, voters preferred the »unaffiliated«, having their own candidate lists and not being supported by a political party. An obvious trend which was expected in the 2018 elections as well was persistence of the so-called »old« mayors, candidates who have continued to serve several, sometimes many mandates in a row.

The predictions turned out to be mostly accurate. Most of the candidates that successfully entered municipality or city councils were unaffiliated, with SDS coming first among the party affiliated candidates (almost 17% council members). Social Democrats were second with approx. 10%, followed by New Slovenia and Slovenian People's Party with approx. 6% each, DeSUS with almost 5%, SMC with approx. 4%, The Left with approx. 3% the Prime Minister Šarec's party with only approx. 2,5% and several others with less than 20 council members nationwide. Slovenian People's Party was the most successful in the number of winning mayor candidates, followed by SD and SDS.

Not all of the municipalities got the mayors in the first round, with 56 voting between their leading two candidates in the second round on December 2. After the second round, two results are still unclear as of today, for the mayor elections in Šmarješke Toplice and Koper, where candidates differ for a small number of votes and appeals were filed for a revision, causing a lot of public and media attention.

Conclusion

With the parliamentary elections in June and the following long process of composing the government which lasted into the month of September, the main political focus this year in Slovenia was on the political parties, their programs and the relations between and within them. This was complemented with a different tone of campaign for the November local elections, where the party politics was subdued, and the local issues took over, with some of the voting procedures still not being resolved.