



## **Weekly Briefing**

**Slovenia political briefing:**  
**Unsuccessful vote of no-confidence against Prime Minister Janez**  
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# Unsuccessful vote of no-confidence against Prime Minister Janez Janša

## Summary

*After a long period of preparation, the opposition with a Prime Minister Candidate Karel Erjavec filed a motion of no-confidence in the beginning of February. Prime Minister Janša survived the vote with a slim result, leaving both the government and the opposition with a minority support. The divided parliament and the unclear voting decisions of the parliamentary groups indicate an unsteady political scene for the remaining year before the next regular elections.*

## Background: Constitutional arch coalition

In Early October a well-known economist Jože P. Damijan published an initiative proposing a »Constitutional Arch Coalition« (»Koalicija ustavnega loka« or KUL). His initiative, soon supported by public intellectuals was addressing what they saw as dangerous breaches of democratic principles and institutions by the current government, especially by the leading Slovenian Democratic Party and its president, Prime Minister Janez Janša. He especially listed the following issues: breaching the independence of judicial branch of government, establishing government control over the key institutions of a democratic state – investigation bureau, police, media etc. –, growing allegiance with EU members (especially Hungary and Poland) that have controversial attitudes towards rule of law, minority rights, gender equality etc, and abusing the epidemic situation to bypass the parliament in key decisions. The proposed Constitutional Arch Coalition, modelled among others after a similar motion in post- WWII Italy, was to include political parties that supported the principles of the democratic and constitutional principles. This invitation included both the opposition parties (Marjan Šarec List, The Left, Social Democrats and Alenka Bratušek Party) and the coalition partners Democratic Pensioners' Party, Modern Centre Party and New Slovenia, appealing to the latter to break with the dangerous totalitarian tendencies of the current government leadership. The four opposition parties announced their supported soon after the initiative was published in a joint press conference, also supporting Jože P. Damijan as a possible candidate

for the Prime Minister in a future vote of no-confidence. After the two defections in spring 2020, when two members of Modern Centre Party joined Social Democrats and Marjan Šarec List, the coalition support had a majority of 46 seats in the parliament (26 of the Slovenian Democratic Party, 8 of the Modern Centre Party, 7 of the New Slovenia and 5 of the Democratic Pensioners' Party), while also relying on the 3 votes of Slovenian National Party.

The situation changed significantly after the changes in the smallest coalition party, the Democratic Pensioners' Party. Following a series of corruption scandals, its president Aleksandra Pivec was forced to step down. Elections in late November were won by DeSUS' previous president Karel Erjavec. Much more critical of Janša's policies compared to Pivec, Erjavec was expected to change the course of DeSUS' policies which did happen immediately after the party presidential elections. The decision of DeSUS leadership to leave the current Janez Janša led coalition was drawn already on December 17. A part of Erjavec' strategy to secure the vote among DeSUS members of the parliament was to propose himself as a candidate for the new prime minister in the vote of no-confidence, which the rest of the Constitutional Arch Coalition agreed to. The withdrawal of DeSUS in principle left Janša's government with 41 votes a minority government, even with the support of Slovenian National Party only adding up to 44 votes. Although the votes of the minority representatives are more difficult to predict politically, it seemed that at least the Hungarian minority representative could be seen as the 45<sup>th</sup> vote in support of Janša's government. During Karel Erjavec' talks with the group of DeSUS members of the parliament it became clear, however, that he and the KUL coalition can not rely on the support of entire DeSUS parliamentary group. The strongest opposition was not surprisingly coming from Robert Polnar, who was seen as a comparatively stronger supporter of Janša's policies. Among the other four especially Branko Simonovič was openly doubtful of Erjavec's motion, leaving the support of the KUL coalition to 42 votes. In order to pass the motion successfully the opposition relied on the alleged split inside another government party, the Modern Centre Party, to potentially add some votes to their sum.

### **The motion of no-confidence**

The first time Erjavec filed the motion of no-confidence in January, an unexpected situation occurred with a series of Covid-19 infections among the members of the parliament.

As was realized, the current protocols of the parliament had no solution to that problem, providing no legitimate alternative to in-person voting. Despite an attempt to pass a protocol of either remote voting or online voting by the opposition parties, the government parties refused to support this initiative, which effectively prevented any solution from being accepted in a parliamentary procedure. Karel Erjavec withdrew the motion and refiled the motion in early February, with the vote scheduled for February 15.

The all-day debate in the parliament started with the positions of Karl Erjavec, the Prime Minister candidate in the proposed motion of no-confidence, and the current Prime Minister Janez Janša. Erjavec first stressed the reasons for the motion: the progressing denormalization of the country, disrespect for the key constitutional principles, alliance with EU countries which don't respect the rule of law and the failure of the current government to successfully manage the Covid-19 epidemic and its damaging effect on the economy and society. He summarised the main elements of the new Constitutional Arch Coalition programme into four pillars: health, solidarity, environment, and development. In the area of health, the KUL coalition attempts to strengthen the public healthcare system and abolish the complementary health insurance. In the area of solidarity two points were stressed by Erjavec: the awaited long-term care act and a new housing act. In the area of environment, a new law on climate policy is planned by KUL. In the area of development, the main point stressed by Erjavec was to raise the funding for research and development, simplifying the procedures for companies and raising of the budget for culture. In addition, Erjavec also stressed a revision of the foreign policy strategies. Janez Janša's response was almost entirely centred around the criticism of the motion as being a destructive move in the times of the epidemic and an unnecessary hindering of the work of the government. He also claimed that the allegations of the opposition are not true. He interpreted the government policies as being successful and interpreted the failures be largely a result of the wrong policies of the previous governments. While the heated debate was also being accompanied by the demonstrations against the current government in front of the parliament, the expected results were becoming more predictable after Modern Centre Party presented their position. Tellingly, the position of Modern Centre Party was not presented by the leader of the parliamentary group Janja Sluga, lately the most prominent critical voice against Janša's policies within the party, but by Gregor Perič, a strong supporter of Janša. He stressed that the decision of SMC is clear, and they will not support Erjavec' motion. After the debate ended at 9 PM, the vote started. The results were fairly complex. Only 53 members of the parliament took their voting ballots and out of the 53 ballots cast, 6 were not valid, 7 voted against the motion and 40 voted in support. It can be speculated that the 53 ballots taken most probably

consisted of the members of the Constitutional Arch Coalition members – adding up to 39, along with 4 DeSUS members, 8 SMC members and the two minority representatives. If that speculation was mostly accurate, the support vote of 40 meant that the no-confidence vote was supported by KUL members and one DeSUS member. The six invalid ballots could then be interpreted as a decision of the remaining DeSUS members as well as perhaps one or more SMC members to not support the Janša government but at the same time to not support Erjavec's motion either. The seven votes against probably consisted mostly of SMC members, but could also include one DeSUS member (Polnar) and one or two minority representatives. The fact that at least one, but possibly more Modern Centre Party representatives opted to not support the current government, hints at an already observed split within that party. In effect, the vote showed an unfortunate reality of the current parliament which will make the political life very unstable in the future. The votes against the motion and in support of the current government were 44, while the votes in support of the alternative coalition were also 40, meaning that both the coalition and the Erjavec-led opposition failed to get the majority of parliament votes.

## **Conclusions**

After a slim vote of no-confidence against Prime Minister Janša both the government and the Erjavec-led opposition failed to secure a parliamentary majority. Two possible scenarios may result from this: an attempt by Janša to consolidate the government and possibly having deferring DeSUS parliament members joining the government side, or, alternatively, the opposition might seek another candidate for the vote of no confidence. In case none of the two work, the unstable government may continue until the next scheduled elections in 2022, which – especially in the face of an expected economic crisis – might give giving the opposition time to consolidate as stronger voters' support.