



Weekly Briefing

**Slovenia political briefing:
Demands for snap elections getting louder
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Summary

The tense political situation caused by the hung parliament, where neither of the sides has a majority, has caused the opposition parties and the civil society to call for snap elections. The reaction of the leading government party was decidedly negative, and it was made clear that the Janša government wishes to continue its term at least for 7 more months, until the end of the Slovenian EU Presidency. Some of the coalition partners, however, also seem to have start preparing for the potential snap election before that time by exploring the options of joining pre-election coalitions.

Background: Changed support of the Janša's government in the National Assembly

Earlier this year, during the vote of no-confidence against Prime Minister Janez Janša, turbulent changes started occurring within the coalition member parties and former coalition partners. The vote showed radical tensions in two parties: the Democratic Pensioners' Party and the Modern Centre Party. In the Democratic Pensioners' Party (DeSUS), which has by that time officially left the government coalition, the vote showed that its members of the parliament at least partly still supported Janša. This reality provoked their party president, Karel Erjavec, to resign and entirely withdraw from the party soon after the no-confidence vote. Two prominent members reacted to this pro-government turn of the DeSUS parliamentary group. First one of its members, Jurij Lep, announced in mid-March that he is leaving the parliamentary group, and this was followed by the former Minister of Health Tomaž Gantar, who announced he was leaving DeSUS in late March. Although not officially part of the coalition, the remaining DeSUS members of the parliament, excluding Lep, now continue to vote in support of the government. At the same time, another coalition member party also split along the lines of supporting Prime Minister Janez Janša's policies. Modern Centre Party parliamentarians still supported Janša at the February vote of no confidence, but soon after this turning point apparent signs of disagreements started. Two most vocal critics of the Slovenian Democrats' decisions, especially their refusal to finance the Slovenian Press Agency, were the Speaker of the National Assembly, Igor Zorčič, and the head of the Modern Centre Party parliamentary group, Janja

Sluga. These to, along with Branislav Rajić left the parliamentary group and became non-aligned parliamentarians along with former DeSUS member of the parliament Jurij Lep.

Hung parliament and the parliamentary blockade

The changed relations between and in the parliamentary groups became clear on March 30 when 38 members of the parliament filed a motion to replace Igor Zorčič as the Speaker due to the fact that he left the Modern Centre Party. Although never being written as a rule, they stressed that according to customary conduct it is expected that the Speaker belongs to one of the parties in the government coalition. The vote revealed the split situation in the parliament with insufficient 45 votes in favour of his removal from office. In the first week of May, members of the parliament from coalition parties repeated the initiative to remove Igor Zorčič from office. A delegation led by head of the Slovenian Democrats' parliamentary group, Daniel Krivec, presented Zorčič with what they claimed were 47 signatures in favor of his resignation. As it turned out however, the unnumbered list did not specify what the signees were signing under and when Zorčič refused to accept the proposal, only 38 members of the parliament out of 47 alleged signees were left to sign the motion for a repeated vote against Zorčič. What seems to have been a tactical move will result in a repeated vote at the end of May which will reveal if the support of the coalition will have change in-between. Apart from the hung parliament, where the coalition is unable to pass anything that would require a majority of votes in favour an additional issue recently hindered the functioning of the parliament. Coalition parties refused to let the newly non-aligned parliamentaries to be represented in the parliamentary boards and commissions, thus effectively strengthening their own representation in the working of the parliament. This issue was only resolved in mid-May. On May 17th the situation in the parliament became even more worrying, when the parliament was unable to even confirm the agenda for its May session with 42 votes in favour and 42 against and the session was called off before it even started.

Parties started preparing for elections

Following the recent events in the parliament, the calls for the necessity of imminent snap election grew louder, especially on the side of the opposition parties, Social Democrats, The Left, Marjan Šarec List and Alenka Bratušek Party. Prime Minister Janez Janša responded in an interview on the national television, stating that such a move would be risky before and

during Slovenia starts its half year presidency of the EU Council. He strongly criticized these appeals for being destructive and called for constructive patriotism not to endanger Slovenia's image in the eyes of the international community. On the other hand, his critics soon responded with listing the Prime Minister's actions which themselves seriously jeopardized the state's reputation abroad – e. g. his comments on US election, his behaviours in EU Parliament commissions etc. While some coalition members of the parliament mentioned the possibility of Janša tying the vote of no-confidence to the next vote against Zorčič or to some other law the government side decides to pass through the parliament, this seems highly unlikely. Prime Minister and his political party seem determined to finish the EU Council presidency before even considering the possibility of snap elections, which by that time would only be few months ahead of the scheduled elections. The demands for snap elections are also getting louder on the side of the civil society, especially the ongoing Friday protests against the policies of Janez Janša's government. The protest movement announced a large-scale public protest on May 28 in support for snap elections.

Despite this determination, some coalition members are obviously not that confident about the government finishing the full term. The decision to do so is understandable, especially due to the polls showing an almost non-existent support for the coalition partner parties. With the government being objected against by a very high 70% of the respondents (source: Ninamedia) and the decreasing support of the Janša's Slovenian Democrats (now at 18.1%), none of the coalition parties apart from the New Slovenia with just over 7% were even close to entering the parliament. The May 2021 polls show a disappointingly low support for both DeSUS (0.5%) and the Modern Centre Party (0.6%) and the supporting Slovenian National Party of Zmago Jelinčič is also far from parliamentary threshold at 1%. Between the coalition members, the president of the Modern Centre Party and the Minister of Economic development, Zdravko Počivalšek – whose resignation from the ministerial position and return to the parliament at the moment seems one of the only options for the government to reclaim the party majority – seems to have started preparing for the next elections first. He supported the initiative "Povežimo Slovenijo" (Connect Slovenia) which aims to join forces of several smaller right-wing political movements: Slovenian People's Party (SLS) of Marjan Podobnik, right-wing green movement of Andrej Čuš, New People's Party of Franc Kangler. Another political movement, which might join forces with the "Povežimo Slovenijo", was started by the former DeSUS president Aleksandra Pivec, who left the party in 2020 after having been involved in a corruption scandal. Her party, based on local politics, is called "Naša dežela" (Our Land). Both of these movements can be seen as an attempt to gather centre-right political votes and

potentially enable Janez Janša to try and compose another right-wing coalition, which he would otherwise be unable to do with the currently low support for his party and the New Slovenia. Another new political movement Zelena dejanja (“Green Actions”) or Z.DEJ was established recently by the former Minister for Environment in the previous government of Marjan Šarec, Jure Leben. It was immediately accused of being a “sister-party” with the Pivec’s Our Land party due to the almost identical first public presentations, a connection they both subsequently denied. The political profile of Leben’s party is not yet pronounced, so it is difficult to speculate what would happen in his future decisions to join either left- or right- oriented coalitions.

Conclusions

With the hung parliament the future developments in the Slovenian politics are very unpredictable. The Prime Minister’s determination not to allow snap elections before the end of the Slovenian EU Council presidency might result in new attempts by the coalition to secure at least another potential vote for the coalition majority, which might in turn disturb the already unstable equilibrium between the political parties which support the currently leading Slovenian Democratic Party and its policies. The failure to secure the majority, on the other hand, would eventually result in snap elections, which both the coalition and the opposition parties have started to prepare for.