Slovenia political briefing:
The results of the Slovenian parliamentary election in 2022 and the formation of the new government
Gašper Pirc
The results of the Slovenian parliamentary election in 2022 and the formation of the new government

Summary

The political situation during the term of the 14th government of Slovenia, led by Prime Minister Janez Janša, has been among the most turbulent in the history of independent Slovenia.

While the former government has been praised by some for its economic performance and its presidency of the Council of the European Union, it has also been frequently (and heavily) discussed and negatively characterized by the institutions of the EU and the European media, especially for its stance on the issues of the freedom of the press, its public communication, and its supposed attempts to politicize critical social institutions.

On April 24, 2022, the parliamentary election was held in Slovenia after which Slovenia will apparently get a new government. In the elections, the political newcomer Freedom Movement handily defeated the traditional party SDS. Given the large margin of difference between the ideologically similar parties on the center-left (Freedom Movement, SD, and the Left) and the parties on the center-right wing (SDS, NSi), it is believed that the formation of the new government coalition will be relatively easy. The coalition negotiations already started at the beginning of May 2022.

Background: the outline of the Slovenian government between 2018 and 2022

As I already mentioned in my previous briefings on recent developments in Slovenian politics, since the parliamentary elections in 2018, Slovenian politics has endured unstable political conditions with the governmental change in 2020, weak coalition(s), and frequent interpellations and demonstrations which showcase the lack of trust in ruling parties and unwillingness to cooperate – or at least consent to – with the decisions on behalf of the government.

The previous Slovenian parliamentary election was held on 3 June 2018. It was originally scheduled to be held in June 2018 but with the resignation of Prime Minister Miro Cerar on 14 March 2018 the parties decided to snap elections.

Given the inability of the party with the greatest amount of votes (24.92% or 25 seats), SDS (Slovenian Democratic Party), to form a coalition, the Slovenian government was for the first time formed by a minority coalition, led by List of Marjan Šarec despite his party only
received 12.6% of the votes and won 13 seats in parliament. The party became the main constituent of the government of the center-left coalition with the Modern Centre Party (SMC), Social Democrats (SD), Party of Alenka Bratušek (SAB), and Democratic Party of Pensioners of Slovenia (DeSUS), with the support from The Left (Levica) and the Italian and Hungarian National Minorities. However, due to several issues (among them, structural difficulties, lack of cohesion, and the presence of a strong parliamentary strong opposition due to the coalition’s minority status), the government was forced to dissolve after the resignation of the Prime Minister Marjan Šarec at the beginning of 2020.

The new government, formed around the former opposition leader Janez Janša, leader of the Slovenian Democratic Party (SDS), was established in spring 2020. The new coalition, comprised of the Slovenian Democratic Party, Modern Centre Party, New Slovenia (NSi), and Democratic Party of Pensioners of Slovenia with the support from the Slovenian National Party (SNS) and minorities representatives has had a parliamentary majority, was relatively successful in terms of its presidency of the Council of EU but also ran into a significant set of difficulties, being criticized for its public communication, the political pressures on the non-governmental organizations, public institutions, and for its response to the heated situations. Concerning its facing several interpellations and drifting support, the media started to regard the current government as a so-called "hanging government" in the second half of 2021.

After weeks of heavy pressure, at the beginning of November 2021 the president of Slovenia, Borut Pahor, declared that the regular parliamentary elections will be held on the earliest possible date on April 24, 2022

The 2022 parliamentary election in Slovenia and the final results

The Slovenian parliamentary election was held for the ninth time in the history of independent Slovenia on April 24, 2022. The elections were held on the first possible date in terms of the regular political setting. At the beginning of May, the National Electoral Commission also counted the ballots that arrived from abroad by post. The final figures show that 1,203,373 voters voted in the elections or more than 300,000 more than four years ago. Turnout was 70.92%.which is a substantial increase in comparison to the previous election.

According to the final election results published on the DVK website, the winning Freedom Movement received more than 410,000 votes (34.45 percent), followed by the SDS with just under 280,000 votes (23.48 percent). The winning party will occupy 41 seats in the new parliament, while the second-placed SDS will hold 27. The NSi (81,794 votes, 6.86 percent), SD (79,709 votes, 6.69 percent), and the Left also crossed the parliamentary threshold
with 53,234 or 4.46 percent of votes. NSi thus has eight, SD seven, and the Left five seats in the parliament.

Other parties received less than 4% of the vote in the elections and did not reach the threshold, and thus did not get into the parliament. The two parties that ended the closest to the parliamentary threshold were the LMŠ parties (44,401 votes, 3.72 percent of support) and the Connect Slovenia movement (40,612 votes, 3.41 percent of support).

DVK (National Electoral Commission) is expected to adopt the minutes of the final outcome on Saturday afternoon, which will be published in the official gazette of the DVK. It must do so by May 10 at the latest, and it must send an official report to the President of the Republic, thus officially ending the deadlines for constituting a new parliament and electing a government.

**The coalition negotiations and the speculation on the composition of the 15th Slovenian government**

Just after the election, Robert Golob, the president of the relative winner of the elections, the Freedom Movement, and the most likely candidate for the new Prime Minister of Slovenia, stated that he will start the coalition talks immediately and intends to set the new government as soon as possible; given the large margin between the two most successful parties and especially the gap in terms of the parliament seats between the center-left and left-wing parties on one side and the (moderate) right-wing on the other, it is believed that Golob might be able to construct a new government in a record time.

In the first week of May 2022, the coalition negotiations between the Freedom Movement, the SD, and the Left began. As of now, various names of potential new ministers are circulating in the public, and the new government is expected to get a clear outline in the coming days.

Given the relative ideological similarity between the center-left parties the Freedom Movement, the SD, and the Left, and the fact that they combined for as many as 53 seats in the parliament, the negotiations and the formation of the government can indeed be quick. Along with the two parliamentary parties, Golob also mentioned the possibility of inviting two other KUL (Constitutional Arc Coalition) parties, LMŠ and SAB, into the new government.

Currently, it is believed that the parliament might be led by the vice-president of the Freedom Movement, Urška Klakočar Zupančič which would be the first instance of a woman leading the parliament in the Slovenian history. The MPs will vote on Klakočar Zupančič's candidacy at the inaugural session of the new convocation of the parliament, which will take
place on 13 May, according to the Slovenian President Borut Pahor. To be elected, she needs a majority in parliament or 46 votes. Until her election, the inaugural session will be chaired by the oldest member of the new convocation, 73-year-old nuclear safety expert Miroslav Gregorič, also from the Freedom Movement. Gregorič was initially one of the possible candidates for the post of President of the Parliament, formally the second-highest political office in the country.

According to forecasts, the future government will consist of a larger share of women than before, so half of the departments in Golob's government could be headed by ministers.

It is believed that the Freedom Movement will get 10 ministerial portfolios; the SD party, which won seven seats in the parliamentary elections, wants to negotiate at least four ministerial portfolios, while the Left, which will have five MPs in the new parliament, estimates that the government team will consist of at least three ministers. Currently, it is assumed that the wishes of the SD and the Left do not sit overly well with the intentions of the Freedom Movement, so the negotiations could unfold with smaller gains from the less successful coalition parties.

If the SD got four and the Left three ministries, the Freedom Movement would have 10 ministers with the same number of ministries. According to the stated speculation, there could however be some changes to the arrangement of portfolios. The president of the Svoboda Movement, Robert Golob, has already announced an amendment to the government law. Among other things, the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport are to be divided into two ministries - the Ministry of Education and Sport and the Ministry of Higher Education, Science, Innovation and Digitization - and the Ministries of Infrastructure and Environment will be merged. According to the announcements, the Freedom Movement will take over the leadership of the Ministry of Finance and Health, as well as a new department that will combine the field of environment and infrastructure.

There has been a lot of public information in recent days about who could make up the new government team. It seems almost certain that the president of the Freedom Movement, Robert Golob, will take over the post of Prime Minister. Among the names who could occupy more prominent positions in the government or ministries are former Police Director General Tatjana Bobnar as a candidate for interior minister, banker Igor Stebernak as a potential finance minister, and vice-president of the Svoboda Movement Marta Kos. The second vice-president of the Svoboda Movement, Urška Klakočar Zupančič, is meanwhile a candidate for president of the parliament.
From the ranks of the SD, party president Tanja Fajon will most likely become foreign minister, Dominika Švarc Pipan is expected to run for justice, Miran M. Cvikl could take over the ministry, and Andreja Katič would be the new defense minister. Among the ministerial candidates from the SD party, Emilija Stojmenova, an associate professor at the Faculty of Electrical Engineering in Ljubljana, is also mentioned.

SD is also expected to propose a team to lead the Ministry of Labor, Family, and Social Affairs. The candidate for the minister is said to be a member of the SD party who has for now never been a minister, although there is also a possibility that the Left will take over this ministry. The Left Party will nominate coordinator Luka Mesec as one of the ministers, and Nataša Sukič and Matej Tašner Vatovec are also mentioned as possible candidates.

The former prime ministers, Alenka Bratušek and Marjan Šarec, who failed to get into parliament with their parties, have also been mentioned as potential members of the government team. According to the Slovenian national television, they are not supposed to become ministers but could hold the position of state secretaries.

**Conclusion**

For now, we cannot yet fully determine what the new Slovenian government will be shaped like; however, as soon as in May, the names of the future ministers might already be confirmed.

Generally, the result of the election came somewhat as a surprise. While Robert Golob has been well-regarded due to his economic prowess and has had years of political experience, his Freedom Movement won the election with a larger-than-expected gap ahead of the second-placed SDS. While SDS won a high number of votes, it ended up heavily trailing the Freedom Movement and is without real possibility to form a government. It is believed that many people voted tactically against SDS due to the perceived racial positions and the supposed political abuses of that party in the recent governmental term.

With only 5 parties reaching the 4% parliamentary threshold, it will be interesting to see how the relevant political discussion will be conducted in the next parliamentary circle; however, it is not believed that the European community can expect any aggressive, unexpected actions on behalf of the new government.