



Weekly Briefing

Slovenia political briefing:

The formation and the confirmation of the new (15th) Slovenian government and the new political coalition and opposition

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Summary

After 4 years of relatively contentious time in Slovenian politics, it is widely believed that Slovenia may have gained a potentially relatively stable government which, at least for now, appears to have a wide public support. The new Slovenian coalition started working on the coalition agreement soon after the parliamentary election on April 24, 2022.

In May 2022 Robert Golob, the leader of the winners of the election the Freedom Movement was confirmed as the new Prime Minister of Slovenia. At the beginning of June 2022, a new governmental team has been confirmed, despite the significant amount of criticism from the new opposition.

Background: Slovenian politics in the previous governmental cycle and the April 2022 parliamentary election

The current governmental setup follows 13th and 14th government of Slovenia who both led Slovenian politics for 2 years in a relatively contentious time with varying levels of success.

After parliamentary elections on 3 June 2018, the Slovenian government was for the first time

formed by minority coalition under the aegis of the List of Marjan Šarec. However, the government led by the Prime Minister Šarec was beset by structural difficulties, lack of cohesion, and the presence of the strong parliamentary opposition due to its minority status, which led to the resignation of the Prime Minister and the dissolution of the government in the beginning of 2020.

The new government was then formed in spring 2020 around the former opposition leader, Janez Janša, leader of the Slovenian Democratic Party which otherwise won the most votes at the parliamentary elections in 2018. However, despite the new coalition had a parliamentary majority, it faced heavy political opposition, there were regular demonstrations from populace, and despite the relatively successful presidency of the Council of the EU, some disapproval from several institutions of European Union (including European Commission) and European media was occasionally voiced, At some point, the leading party of the coalition, Social Democratic party, was even accused of authoritarian rule and encouragement of

repressive measures of behalf of the governmental agencies. With respect to its facing of several interpellations and drifting support, media started to regard the current government in fall 2021 as a so-called “hanging government”.

In the beginning of November, the president of Slovenia, Borut Pahor, called for the holding

of regular elections on the earliest possible date on April 24, 2022.

On April 24, 2022, a regular parliamentary election was held in Slovenia which ended with a clear victory of the political newcomer, the Freedom Movement. The president of the Freedom Movement and the new Prime Minister of Slovenia, Robert Golob, became the leading party of the new government coalition which also consists of two other (center-)left parties that crossed the parliamentary threshold at the election: Social Democrats (SD) and the Left. In May 2022, Golob was confirmed as the new Prime Minister of Slovenia.

The 15th government of the Republic of Slovenia

On June 1, 2022 the new Slovenian government was confirmed on an extraordinary session of the parliament. After a seven-hour debate, the Slovenian Parliament confirmed the 17-member ministerial team at an extraordinary session with 53 votes in favor and 28 against. Slovenia thus gained the 15th government under the leadership of Robert Golob, which consists of the parties Svoboda, SD and Levica.

The vote on the new government was attended by 81 MPs: 53 voted in favor and 28 against. The oaths of all 17 candidates then followed. Just over a month after the parliamentary elections, the 15th Slovenian government took office. As the government announced via Twitter, the new Prime Minister Robert Golob has already taken over the post from the Prime Minister on leave Janez Janša.

In his closing address to the parliament during the confirmation session, Robert Golob remarked that "freedom is something that people have chosen on April 24," referring to the previous debate of the MPs. "For them, freedom is unfortunately all that your government was not," he told the opposition part of parliament. He reiterated his words that the future

government is characterized by diversity and balance. As he pointed out, this is the only way to solve many challenges in society and treat problems equally. "In the complex situation in the world, working in kindergartens limited to one area no longer yields real results," he said, emphasizing interdepartmental cooperation. "Evaluate us by results," he stressed, adding that "goals will always be ambitious".

Ministerial team of the 15th Slovenian government is as follows:

- Tatjana Bobnar, Minister of the Interior (the choice of Freedom Movement from their quota)

- Tanja Fajon, Minister of Foreign Affairs (the choice of SD from their quota)

- Klemen Boštjančič, Minister of Finance (from the Freedom Movement quota)

- Danijel Bešič Loredan, Minister of Health (from the Freedom Movement quota)

- Marjan Šarec, Minister of Defense (from the Freedom Movement quota)

- Dominika Švarc Pipan, Minister of Justice (from the SD quota)

- Matjaž Han, Minister of Economic Development and Technology (from the SD quota)

- Aleksander Jevšek, Minister without Portfolio, Minister for Development and European Cohesion Policy (from the SD quota)

- Luka Mesec, Minister of Labor, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities (the choice of the Left from their quota)

- Asta Vrečko, Minister of Culture (from the Left quota)

- Uroš Brežan, Minister of the Environment and Spatial Planning (from the Freedom Movement quota)

- Bojan Kumer, Minister of Infrastructure (from the Freedom Movement quota)

- Igor Papič, Minister of Education, Science and Sport (from the quota of the Freedom Movement)

- Sanja Ajanović Hovnik, Minister of Public Administration (from the quota of the Freedom Movement)

- Irena Šinko, Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Food (from the Freedom Movement quota)

- Emilija Stojmenova Duh, Minister without Portfolio, Minister for Digital Transformation (from the Freedom Movement quota)

- Matej Arčon, Minister without Portfolio for Slovenes Abroad (from the Freedom Movement quota)

Even before the session of the parliament, the mandate-election commission also met, which confirmed the parliamentary mandate of Bojan Čebela, the current mayor of Borovnica, who replaced Robert Golob in the parliament at the beginning of the session.

Robert Golob proposed to the parliament a list of 17 candidates for ministerial positions. In the introduction to the session where the government was confirmed, he presented the concept of balance that has been followed in assembling the new ministerial team. He emphasized that the government is made up of experienced politicians with extensive experience in both domestic and European politics.

According to Golob, the other half of the government will consist of experts, including five doctors of science. Golob pointed out that many of them have realized their academic careers, and some of them have realized their experiences and achievements in the field.

The government is also balanced by gender quotas, by the ratio of women to men. More than 40 percent of the ministries will be taken over by women which is the most so far.

Ever since the election, the leading party of the previous coalition and the current opposition, SDS, has been critical towards the forming 15th government and the actions of the future coalition, including the proposed legal changes. The other opposition party, NSi, has also also voiced some criticism but has adhered to the constructive dialogue and possible cooperation with the coalition.

Among the first moves of the new government will be, in addition to the usual personnel moves – the appointment of state secretaries, the director of the government's communications office (Ukom), the director of the Slovenian Intelligence and Security Agency (Sova) and the director general of the police – law to regulate the health situation, formulating strategies before a possible new health crisis in Autumn.

Until the repeal, there will be seven ministers and ten ministers in the government. When the procedures for the submitted proposal for a consultative referendum on amendments to the government law expire, three more new ministries will be established. There are 11 candidates from the Freedom movement quota, four from the SD and two from the Left (after the confirmation of the amendment to the law on government they will, according to the coalition

agreement, gain another one). Handovers at individual ministries mostly took place on Thursday, June 2, 2022.

The leading positions of the Slovenian Parliament and the disposition of the new opposition

Previously, Urška Klakočar Zupančič (Freedom Movement) was confirmed as a Speaker of the National Assembly (president of the Parliament) which, according to the Slovenian political system, represents a second-highest executive position after the Prime Minister. Furthermore, Meira Hot (SD) and Nataša Sukič (Left) have already taken the Vice-Presidential posts.

The leaders of the opposition, SDS, have been critical towards the new coalition ever since the parliamentary election in April, particularly in regards to the proposed changes to the governmental law which would create additional ministries and restructure some of the current portfolios.

At the end of May 2022, SDS were even in disagreement with their opposition partner Nova Slovenija (NSi) as NSi, with the support of the coalition, has improved its initial position in the distribution of leadership positions in the National Assembly committees in exchange for a few vice-presidential positions, and Jernej Vrtovec will head the Public Finance Control Commission.

However, the SDS insisted that they have six presidential positions, so they announced that they may not even propose a candidate for vice-president of the National Assembly.

Nevertheless, at the beginning of June 2022, the parliamentary group of the SDS party finally submitted a proposal for a candidate for deputy speaker of the National Assembly. All 27 MPs supported the former leader of the SDS parliamentary group, Danijel Krivec, in holding this position.

Danijel Krivec was elected to parliament in several terms, for the first time in 2004. In all parliamentary terms he was a member of several working bodies of the National Assembly, including the Committee on Infrastructure and the Committee on Relations with Slovenes Abroad also a member of the committees for the economy, foreign policy and a member of the

commission of inquiry to determine the political responsibility of public officials in the investment in block 6 of the Šoštanj Thermal Power Plant, SDS MPs said in the explanation.

The first to sign the proposal has been the leader of the SDS parliamentary group, Jelka Godec, who replaced Krivec in this position when convening a new composition of the National Assembly.

The new appointments at the head of national agencies and critical public offices

Among others, on the session in the beginning of June 2022, the government dismissed four members of the founding board from the council of the public health institute of the National Institute of Public Health, namely Rok Tavčar, Matej Forte, Marija Rogar and Silva Duh. Mitja Blaganjeta, Milena Kramar Zupan, Brane Bregar and Andraž Jakelj were appointed to replace them for the remainder of the term.

According to the government's decision, Matjaž Trontelj, Špela Jovanovič-Gaberšek, Mira Kos Skubic and Omar Hanuna are leaving the board of the public health institution of the National Laboratory for Health, Environment and Food. Simona Gerenčer, Sonja Bezjak, Janez Jesenovec and Luka Kajtna are replacing them at their positions for the rest of their term.

Previously, the government replaced the directors of Sova, the police and the Communication Office during the first personnel decisions - as is usual when changing the government. The Slovenian Intelligence and Security Agency (Sova) is being replaced by Joško Kadivnik, the current head of Sova's counter-intelligence department, instead of the current director Janez Stušek. The former director of the Criminal Police Administration Boštjan Lindav succeeded Anton Ulaj as the Director General of the Police. Ukom will replace Uroš Urbanija with Dragan Barbutovski as the acting director.

As of now, the Government Office of Legislation is led by Rado Fele, who replaced Mateja Lekan Štrukelj. From the position of Director General of the Intelligence and Security Service of the Ministry of Defense, the government dismissed Jaroš Britovšek and, for a time, appointed Andrej Fefer. Damjan Žugelj is no longer the director of the Office for the Prevention of Money Laundering; provisionally, he was succeeded by Anika Vrabc Božič.

As Prime Minister Robert Golob explained after the government session, people have been appointed to all positions as acting managers, because the government does not want to make a mistake in the rush of the first night and attends to quickly fill all positions with appropriate experts.

Conclusion

As of now, both media and pundits seem to believe that the new government has the will and abilities to present a stable political leadership in relatively problematic times. One of the first concerns of the new government will be seeking immediate solution to the growing economic crisis due to the effects of the COVID-19 crisis, the war in Ukraine and the consequent rising prices of food and energy products. As this task concerns the entirety of European Union, the new Slovenian government already started to cooperate with the leaders of the EU.

In addition, the new government will need to address the concern lack of trust in some of the critical public institutions, including police and the health sector as well as adhere to their promise of the improvement of social and labor conditions for the Slovenian. While it is too early to say how the new governmental team will fare in regards to those issues, the quick and relatively non-problematic formation of the new government seem to set an encouraging tone to the start of the new governmental cycle.