



Weekly Briefing

Slovenia external relations briefing:

The Slovenia-Russia relations before and after the start of the Russo-Ukrainian war

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Summary

Ever since the start of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the relations between Slovenia and Russia have possibly been at the lowest point in recorded history. While in the past, Slovenia has generally been favorably inclined towards Russia, and the latter was, despite Slovenian turn towards the Western world after the independence, considered as an important economic partner, the events of Euromaidan, its immediate consequences, and the later full-scale war in Ukraine changed the mutual relationship between the countries. In 2022, Slovenia joined most of the European Union in their condemnation of the Russian invasion of Ukraine and supported the sanctions against Russia while Russia placed Slovenia on the list of “unfriendly nations”.

In the past month, Slovenia continued to support the existing and joined some of the states of the EU in the next round of sanctions against Russia while it seeks to detach itself from the dependence on Russian energy products.

Background: the Slovenian-Russian relations before and after the Slovenian independence

During recorded history, the later Slovenes generally aligned with other Slavic people, especially when a large part of today`s Slovenia was under Austrian rule (until the end of World War I in 1918). Due to its large population and influence, Russia was considered a critical part of the idea of pan-Slavic communion. [\[1\]](#) Since most of today`s Slovenia was a part of the Habsburgian empire pre-WW1, Russia was technically considered a military enemy during World War 1 and the Russian prisoners of war suffered heavy casualties during the building of the (still) highest paved mountain pass in Slovenia on Vršič; however, this suffering of Russians has been commemorated every year after the independence of Slovenia, showcasing the relative strength of the relationship and the will to continue nurturing mutual bonds between the countries.

While as a part of Yugoslavia Slovenia has never been considered under the sphere of Soviet influence, it has established relatively strong relations with the Soviet Union`s most populous successor, Russia. Slovenia and Russia officially established diplomatic relations on

May 25, 1992. Data from 2017 shows that Russia has been the 7th largest trade partner and the 6th biggest investor in Slovenia. The source states that the “officials from both countries stress their shared Slavic identity and are supporting wide cultural relations as well. Ljubljana was chosen as a headquarter of the Forum of Slavic Cultures jointly sponsored by presidents of Slovenia and Russia.”[\[2\]](#)

While Slovenia has decidedly moved toward the West after its independence and has favored the United States of America and the European Union as its main trade partners and economic reference, Slovenia has readily considered nurturing productive and relatively friendly relations with Russia. In 2011, Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin visited Slovenia, and the Russian and Slovenian delegations discussed (the continuation of the) economic, scientific and cultural partnership. [\[3\]](#) With that being said, unlike during the 19th and early 20th centuries when the idea of pan-Slavism and the cultural and political unification of Slavic nations was seriously debated among Slovenian politicians and cultural workers, the current relationship between Russia and Slovenia appears to be primarily based on strategic interests. In 2007, the European Council on Foreign Relations published A Power Audit of EU-Russia Relations where Slovenia was considered a “Friendly Pragmatist” in regards to the type of its relationship with Russia, similar to Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Finland, Hungary, Luxembourg, Malta, Portugal, and Slovakia. [\[4\]](#)

However, while the economic cooperation between the countries remained active (even as of 2022, Slovenia imports 17.6% of its total available energy from the Russian Federation, which is however below the EU-27 average of 24.4% [\[5\]](#)), the relations between the countries took a turn for the worse after the events of the Euromaidan in 2013 and especially later when the tense relations between Russia and Ukraine turned into Russo-Ukrainian war. While initially, Slovenia refused to outright condemn Russia, was hesitant to place the blame for the conflict solely on Russia, and favored a diplomatic approach to solving the Ukrainian crisis, after the Russian annexation of Crimea and the invasion of Ukraine in 2022 Slovenian government stated their full support for the Ukrainian cause and fully condemned the Russian aggression. [\[6\]](#) After Slovenia joined the rest of the European Union in their sanctions against Russia, it was placed on a list of “unfriendly nations”.[\[7\]](#)

The Russian invasion of Ukraine and the response from the EU and Slovenia

After the events of the Euromaidan in 2013 when widespread protests, possibly backed by foreign elements, against the allegedly corrupted and pro-Russian regime of President Victor Yanukovich the relations between Ukraine and Russia became increasingly tense. [\[8\]](#) Russia annexed Crimea in February 2014; in the same year, the Russian government was accused of

giving direct instructions to various pro-Russian parties in Ukraine to instigate unrest in Donetsk, Kharkiv, Zaporizhia, and Odesa. Consequentially, the so-called War in Donbas was fought between the Armed Forces of Ukraine and pro-Ukrainian paramilitaries against the pro-Russian insurgents affiliated with the self-proclaimed Donetsk People's Republic (DPR) and detachments of the Russian Armed Forces. At the end of the conflict in 2014, the pro-Russian separatists took control of the greater part of the Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts. [\[9\]](#)

In 2021, there was a diplomatic standoff between Russia, Ukraine, and the representatives of NATO during which, among others, Ukrainian Prime Minister Volodymyr Zelensky warned against Russia's intention of amassing soldiers near the border and accused Russia of stipulating pro-Russian separatism in Ukraine while Russia regarded the deployment of US warships in the Black Sea as a provocation and warned Ukraine that the expansion of NATO's presence in Ukraine may provoke an aggressive response from Russia. [\[10\]](#)

On February 21, 2022, Russian President Vladimir Putin and the Russian government formally recognized the self-proclaimed DPR and LPR as independent states which was followed by the large-scale invasion of the Russian forces. The invasion was immediately condemned by most of the world's countries.

While the invasion initially targeted critical Ukrainian cities such as Kyiv and Kharkiv, the Russian army was repelled in the Western and Central parts of Ukraine and later concentrated on the eastern part of Ukraine with a larger percentage of the primarily Russian-speaking population. The Russian army was condemned for indiscriminate targeting of civilian targets. On September 30, 2022, Russia annexed four oblasts of Ukraine (Luhansk, Donetsk, Kherson, and Zaporizhzhia) which it had to some degree conquered during the invasion. [\[11\]](#)

The invasion was near-unanimously internationally condemned and most of the Western world responded to the Russian aggression with an unprecedented number and scale of sanctions imposed both on the Russian state and the individuals believed to be supportive or responsible for the invasion. [\[12\]](#)

Ever since the beginning of the invasion, the 14th Slovenian government and the leading opposition politicians have been unified in their support for the territorial integrity of Ukraine and the democratic Ukrainian government. The Slovenian government also joined the economic and political sanctions against Russia and provided humanitarian and military aid to Ukraine. Among others, Slovenia also closed its airspace to the Russian planes and abolishes the position of Honorary Consul of Russia. [\[13\]](#)

Under the 15th Slovenian government, Slovenia continued to provide humanitarian support to Ukraine and restated its supportive disposition in terms of the imposition of sanctions against Russia while the Slovenian Minister of Infrastructure stated the intention of Slovenia to cut economic ties with Russia and find an alternative source of energy. [\[14\]](#)

The Slovenian support for the continuation of the sanctions against Russia

In late September 2022, Slovenia has been recorded among the nation which favors cutting the energy ties with Russia. While, as I stated in my economic briefing for September, Slovenia never critically relied on gas in its energy mix, the latter (as well as other Russian imports) still has a relevant role in the heating season. Slovenia thus joined some of the EU states in the next round of sanctions against Russia.

In a letter to the European Commissioner for Energy, Kadra Simson, which was reported by several foreign media, the ministers emphasized that the number of member states that support the introduction of a price cap for gas is increasing.

According to the ministers, limiting the price of natural gas will enable all members to mitigate inflationary pressure, determine the framework for action in case of supply disruptions and limit excess profits in the sector.

The ministers wrote that "the price cap must apply to all wholesale natural gas transactions and should not be limited to certain jurisdictions." In the past, the introduction of a price cap only for Russian gas was mentioned as a possibility.

The energy ministers added that the price cap can be designed in such a way as to ensure the security of supplies and the free flow of gas in Europe, while at the same time reducing gas consumption could be achieved.

Energy Commissioner Simson was asked to prepare a proposal to discuss the price cap at Friday's meeting of energy ministers. According to sources in the EU, the number of signatories of the letter is changing, but it is believed that the Slovenian Minister for Infrastructure Bojan Kumer is among them.

The letter is reported to have been signed by at least 12 of the 27 member states, with some members opposing the proposal, including France, Hungary, and the Netherlands. [\[15\]](#)

On Friday, September 30, the Ministers of the EU Member States responsible for energy later reached a political agreement on measures to deal with the high cost of energy. These include mandatory reduction of electricity consumption and the limitation of revenues of energy companies that produce electricity with technologies cheaper than gas. [\[16\]](#)

Conclusion

As it is clear by now, despite their past affiliations and relative amenity between the countries the Slovenian government(s) have been adamant in their support for the territorial sovereignty of Ukraine and their condemnation of the Russian invasion. Slovenia also joined the common cause of most of the states of the European Union in their imposition of sanctions against Russia; nevertheless, there have been some opposing voices among the Slovenian cultural elite which warned against the intensification of the condemnation of Russia and recommended that Slovenia takes a more neutral, diplomatic approach towards Russia. [\[17\]](#)

While the leading Slovenian politicians mostly blamed the Russian invasion on the Russian state and political leaders and warned against discrimination, the increasingly tense relationship between Slovenia and Russia may also translate into discrimination against the Russian people. Much like the rest of the European Union, Slovenia must therefore find a way to state its political position without affecting the life of the innocents who may already be in a difficult position against their will due to the actions of their leaders.

[1] See Benedejčič, Andrej (2016). Slovenia and its relations with Russia in the Euro-Atlantic context. *Teorija in praksa*, Volume 53, Number 5, page 1143-1171, 1275.

[2] Source: <http://www.aalep.eu/russian-influence-slovenia>

[3] Source: <https://www.24ur.com/novice/gospodarstvo/uresnicuje-se-projekt-juzni-tok.html>

[4] Source: Benedejčič, Andrej (2016). Slovenia and its relations with Russia in the Euro-Atlantic context. *Teorija in praksa*, Volume 53, Number 5, page 1143.

[5] Source: <https://www.stat.si/StatWeb/en/News/Index/10321>

[6] Sources: <https://sloveniatimes.com/slovenia-expects-diplomatic-solution-of-crimea-crisis/> ; <https://www.24ur.com/novice/slovenija/slovenija-je-enotna-in-zdruzena-z-zavezniki-v-eu-in-nato-v-obsodbi-ruske-agresije.html>

[7] Source: <https://www.ctvnews.ca/world/here-are-the-nations-on-russia-s-unfriendly-countries-list-1.5810483>

[8] After Euromaidan, Ukraine decided on a declaratively more democratic future and elected a new pro-Western President Petro Poroshenko.

[9] Source: Galeotti, Mark (2019). *Armies of Russia's War in Ukraine*. Elite 228. Oxford: Osprey Publishing.

[10] Among other sources, see <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2021/12/10/putin-says-conflict-in-eastern-ukraine-looks-like-genocide-a75780>

[11] Source: <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/world/article-putin-signs-documents-to-unlawfully-claim-4-ukrainian-regions-in/>

[12] Sources: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/3/3/unga-resolution-against-ukraine-invasion-full-text> ; <https://edition.cnn.com/2022/02/28/business/russia-ruble-banks-sanctions/index.html>

[13] Among other sources see <https://www.rtv slo.si/slovenija/na-svetu-za-nacionalno-varnost-enotno-z-obsodbo-agresije-v-ukrajini/613788> and <https://www.europeantimes.news/2022/03/slovenia-abolishes-the-position-of-honorary-consul-of-russia/>

[14] Source: <https://www.rtv slo.si/gospodarstvo/kumer-v-dobrih-dveh-tednih-solidarnostni-sporazum-s-hrvasko-glede-plina/640443>

[15] Source: <https://www.sta.si/3085940/ministri-vec-clanic-eu-tudi-slovenije-za-uvodbo-cenovne-kapice-za-plin?q=kapic,simson>

[16] Source: <https://www.sta.si/3087742/ministri-za-energetiko-eu-dosegli-politichni-dogovor-o-ukrepih-za-soocanje-z-energetsko-draginjo?q=kapic,simson>

[17] Source: <https://topnews.si/2022/06/18/predlagam-nasi-vladi-da-se-obnasa-tako-kot-se-je-nekoc-jugoslavija-s-titom-ko-je-predlagala-politiko-neuvrscenosti-spomenka-hribar-predlga-golobovi-vlad-da-glede-pozicioniranja-slovenije-do-u/>