



**The Impact of the  
Russian-Ukrainian  
Conflict on the  
Politics of CEE  
Countries**

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# **The Impact of the Russian-Ukrainian Conflict on the Politics of CEE countries**

**Chief Editor: Dr. LIU Zuokui**

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# **Increasing EUFOR Troops in BiH: Is There Room for Euphoria? (March)**

**Faruk Borić**

## **Summary**

European Forces in Bosnia and Herzegovina - EUFOR, has expanded its contingent to 500 new soldiers. They will be deployed in areas where excesses have been recorded in recent months and years. French jets will perform training flights in BiH airspace. This is a consequence of the war in Ukraine, as well as the Brussels response to Moscow on BiH's ground. Domestic political actors, as well as various experts, connect several issues in the domestic political field in BiH with the geostrategic positioning of the great powers on the European continent.

## **Introduction**

At the end of the February, it was announced that four batches with about 500 reserve members of the European Union Force (EUFOR<sup>1</sup>), stationed outside Bosnia and Herzegovina until now, will be deployed in the country for the next two weeks as reinforcements to existing forces. According to EUFOR's statement, this decision was made in order to more effectively support BiH's partners in maintaining a safe and stable environment. A statement from EUFOR stressed that the deteriorating security situation at the international level could potentially cause instability in BiH. In the end, it was emphasized that the task of these forces is to "show the EU's determination to maintain stability in BiH." "It is a prudent and appropriate

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<sup>1</sup> The history of the presence and mandate of EUFOR in Bosnia and Herzegovina (EUFOR - Operation ALTHEA) can be seen on the official website, mostly in the section "About EUFOR". <https://www.euforbih.org/index.php/about-eufor>



measure that reflects the EU and EUFOR's unequivocal commitment to preserving the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Bosnia and Herzegovina," it said<sup>1</sup>.

## **Help for returnees**

Before the troops even began to arrive, this symbolic strengthening of the EU (military) presence in BiH was further put in context by the head of the European Union Delegation to BiH Johan Sattler, at a meeting with BiH Presidency Chairman Željko Komšić, a strong advocate of BiH integrations both in the EU and even more in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). An additional 500 EUFOR troops will be deployed to parts of Bosnia and Herzegovina where excesses have been reported in the past, especially in returnee settlements, Chairman's cabinet stated after the meeting. The press release also states that Sattler informed Komšić that EUFOR soldiers are equipped and have heavy armored mechanization<sup>2</sup>.

In the first week of March, the media reported that additional EUFOR forces had begun arriving in BiH. "New EUFOR personnel are currently preparing for intensified operational patrols to support our partners in Bosnia and Herzegovina," EUFOR said on its Twitter profile<sup>3</sup>. EUFOR soldiers coming in this expanded composition in BiH are from Austria, Bulgaria, Romania and Slovakia. One of the most widely read media in BiH announced that "BiH citizens will be able to see more military vehicles

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<sup>1</sup> EUFOR activates reserve forces, reinforcements of 500 soldiers arrive in BiH. <https://www.klix.ba/vijesti/bih/eufor-aktivirao-rezervne-snage-u-bih-stize-pojacanje-od-500-vojnika/220224077>

<sup>2</sup> Additional EUFOR troops are arriving in returnee settlements in BiH. <https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/sattler-komsic-bih-vojnici/31728824.html>

<sup>3</sup> EUFOR: Newcomers are preparing to step up patrols and support partners in BiH. <https://www.klix.ba/vijesti/bih/eufor-novopridosle-snage-se-pripremaju-za-pojacano-patroliranje-i-podrsku-partnerima-u-bih/220304114>

with EUFOR markings on the streets of their cities these days, and their arrival was previously announced as support for stability in our country<sup>1</sup>."

Although no state or area of conflict has been explicitly mentioned, it is absolutely clear that the "deteriorating security situation at the international level" in the EUFOR statement refers primarily to the situation in Ukraine. It is not secret: At the meeting in the Presidency with Komšić, the head of the EU Delegation to BiH Satler thanked for BiH's views on the war in Ukraine, as well as for the fact that BiH, through the its ambassadors to UN and Council of Europe (CoE) joined the EU statements on Ukraine and supported Russia's suspension in the CoE. Komšić and his colleague, a member Presidency from Bosniak people, Šefik Džaferović, fully sided with Ukraine and condemned "Russia's attack on the country's territorial integrity and sovereignty"<sup>2</sup>. The third member of the BiH Presidency and leader of Alliance of Independent Social-Democrats (*Savez nezavisnih socijaldemokrata* - SNSD), Milorad Dodik, had a different stance and called for BiH to remain neutral over the war in Ukraine, which many interpreted as his Russian stance. It is no secret also, in fact, that Dodik is known as a Russian ally in the Balkans. After all, on the eve of the last session of the Presidency of BiH held on March 2<sup>nd</sup>, Dodik spoke with the head of Russian diplomacy, Sergey Lavrov. According to the official Facebook page of the Russian Embassy in Sarajevo, "An exchange of views was held on the implementation of the agreements reached after the meeting of Russian President Vladimir Putin and Milorad Dodik in Moscow in December 2021. Steps are planned to intensify efforts in this direction," it is stated. Media noticed there is no explanation what exactly Dodik and the Russian President agreed on two months ago<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> EUFOR forces arrive in Bosnia and Herzegovina in support of the Armed Forces. <https://www.klix.ba/vijesti/bih/snage-eufor-a-pristizu-u-bosnu-i-hercegovinu-kao-podrska-oruzanim-snagama/220305034>

<sup>2</sup> Plenković, Đukanović, Džaferović, Komšić and Osmani condemned the Russian invasion. <https://balkans.aljazeera.net/news/balkan/2022/2/24/celnici-regije-osudili-rusku-invaziju-na-ukrajinu>

<sup>3</sup> In the midst of war chaos, Lavrov found time for Dodik: 'Listen, your agreement with Putin from December should be implemented ...'

In any case, on the issue of Ukraine, the Presidency of BiH again found itself on different sides (two against one). Dodik said there was nothing controversial about EUFOR increasing its capacity, but there was no plan to destabilize the situation in BiH. Dodik said that the arrival of EUFOR soldiers is more for a political game or some other kind of message. "It is insignificant. We have no plan for any destabilization, but we have a plan to continue to fight politically for our rights under the BiH Constitution," Dodik told reporters. Dodik said that the Republic of Srpska's (RS) plan is not to deal with issues of any secession<sup>1</sup>.

However, part of international press in the EU is not inclined to believe Dodik's words. "The main purpose of reinforcing the troops is to signal the determination to preserve the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Due to concrete secessionist steps taken by the pro-Russian right-wing leader of the SNSD party, Milorad Dodik, there have been talks for months about increasing the troops and moving some troops to Brcko<sup>2</sup>", *Der Standard* wrote<sup>3</sup>. There is no doubt for Austrian newspaper: Dodik is supported by Russia, and there are fears across the region that Russia, similar to the "People's Republics" of Lugansk and Donetsk, could also recognize RS as an independent state to create even more instability in the Balkans<sup>4</sup>.

Radio Free Europe (RFE) linked the decision to send additional EUFOR troops to Dodik's moves, which he withdrew after the now-former High Representative Valentin Inzko imposed a Law on banning genocide denial.

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<https://www.jutarnji.hr/vijesti/svijet/lavrov-usred-ratnog-kaosa-nasao-time-for-dodik-cuj-cuj-should-spend-that-your-deal-with-putin-with-putin-from-december-15164088>

<sup>1</sup> Dodik: EUFOR can bring in 5,000 troops, there is no destabilization plan. <https://www.klix.ba/vijesti/bih/dodik-eufor-moze-dovesti-i-5-000-vojnika-ne-postoji-plan-za-destabilizaciju/220225145>

<sup>2</sup> Brcko is a city in the north of the state that has the status of a district, and which in fact divides the Republic of Srpska into northern and southeastern parts.

<sup>3</sup> Due to the attack on Ukraine, EUFOR in BiH is being strengthened. <https://www.dw.com/bs/zbog-napada-na-ukrajinu-se-poja%C4%8Dava-eufor-u-bih/a-60929410>

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*



Since then (that is 2021), RS politicians in BiH government institutions, mostly cadres of Dodik's party SNSD, have more or less boycotted the work of these institutions, and at the RS entity level decisions have been made to transfer competencies from BiH to RS. This has been occurring in the fields of judiciary and health. In his interview for RFE, ex-journalist and military expert Đuro Kozar said that the “boycott of state institutions from RS attempts to disempower state bodies and moves that are recognized as separatist, are reasons why Brussels decided that security situation on the ground should be better monitored<sup>1</sup>”. Alija Kožljak, head of the Department of International Relations and European Studies at Burch International University and former BiH military representative to NATO, concluded in the same article that by strengthening the military presence, “the EU is sending a message that any indication of BiH's security threats will be adequately addressed”<sup>2</sup>.

Somehow, at the same time, EUFOR announced that the French Air and Space Force will perform several flights with "Rafale" airplanes over BiH. According to EUFOR, in light of the deteriorating international security situation, and also as a precaution, the commander of EUFOR's Operation Althea accepted a voluntary offer from the French state to conduct several training flights over BiH in the coming weeks<sup>3</sup>.

The EUFOR force has been deployed in Bosnia and Herzegovina since 2004 and consists of approximately 3,500 members, of which about 600 have been deployed in BiH until this February enlargement. In 2004, EUFOR replaced SFOR (Stabilization Forces), which operated within NATO. The mandate of EUFOR is extended annually by the United Nations Security Council (UN SC). EUFOR is the legal successor to SFOR.

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<sup>1</sup> EUFOR is receiving reinforcements in BiH due to threats from within, not from outside. <https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/nato-eufor-bih-bosna-rs-rusija-ukrajina/31723464.html>

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> In the coming days, French military planes will perform training flights over the BiH sky. <https://www.klix.ba/vijesti/svijet/francuski-vojni-avioni-u-narednim-danima-obavljat-ce-trenazne-letove-bh-nebom/220305040>

That is a very unique case of transferring the legal legacy from an institution of one military alliance, NATO and its SFOR forces, to the institutions of one state union, the EU, and its special EUFOR-Althea operation<sup>1</sup>.

## **Conclusion**

On the issue of EUFOR, the foreign and security policy of the European Union, as well as the internal and security policy of Bosnia and Herzegovina meet. The presence of soldiers under the EU flag has more symbolic than real strength, that is the prevailing opinion. However, it should be emphasized that in the context of the tightening of relations on the EU-Russia line due to Ukraine, Brussels is particularly concerned about not opening another potential hotspot, deep in the belly of the European subcontinent. Due to the strong pro-Russian attitude of BiH Presidency member Milorad Dodik and the RS political elite gathered around him, BiH could potentially be one of such hotspots, and it can be expected that in the coming period EU forces, both military and political, will try to put internal political processes in BiH under control. Domestic political forces that are – at least declaratively – more in favor of BiH's membership in the EU and NATO, will try to use such efforts to achieve pressure on Dodik and the RS elite to give up the announced moves regarding the transfer of competencies from BiH to RS and return to the institutions of the state of BiH. The longer the war in Ukraine lasts and the more victims it takes, the combined internal and external pressures on Dodik and RS will grow. However, although this pressure will mark public space and political debates in BiH, there is no guarantee that it will succeed in its goals.

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<sup>1</sup> More on the history of NATO-led international military structures' participation in the implementation of the Dayton Peace Agreement for Bosnia and Herzegovina can be found at <https://www.nato.int/sfor/docu/d981116a.htm>

# **How the Ukrainian Crisis Caused the First Serious Upheavals and Political Tensions in the Bulgarian Governing Coalition (March)**

**Evgeniy Kandilarov**

## **Summary**

In the last week, Bulgaria's new government, elected just less than two months ago and formed by a coalition of four parties, is facing a first political turmoil. The reason for this was the sudden decision of Prime Minister Kiril Petkov to demand the resignation of the Defense Minister, General Stefan Yanev. The reasons for this decision are related to Yanev's view of the conflict in Ukraine and his suggestions on what position Bulgaria should have. The sudden change of Defense minister and the election of another to replace him has raised tensions in the ruling coalition. At the same time, the fired minister Yanev announced his intention to create a new political party, which in case of collapse of the ruling coalition and new early parliamentary elections has a chance to win a large part of the people's trust.

Less than two months after Bulgaria's new government was elected, Prime Minister Kiril Petkov surprisingly announced that he wants the resignation of Defense Minister Stefan Yanev. This happened on February 28, after Yanev caused outrage in the government by stating that the Russian invasion of Ukraine should not be called "war". Kiril Petkov stated that he has the support of all coalition partners, including his party, "We continue the change", the Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP), Savi Trifovov's "There is such a people", and Democratic Bulgaria, led by Hristo Ivanov.



## **The dismissal of the Minister of Defense from the country's government**

Stefan Yanev, a former army general, was the chief of cabinet of President Rumen Radev, who made him a caretaker minister, a post he occupied from May to December 2021. Kiril Petkov then served as economy minister in Yanev's first caretaker cabinet (May-September 2021). Yanev maintained a good reputation during his time as an interim prime minister in 2021, but has been under fire since he downplayed the need for more NATO troops in Bulgaria and Romania. Earlier in the term of the current government, Yanev caused controversy by saying that he did not believe that it was necessary for allied military personnel to be deployed in Bulgaria – a statement of policy that had not been coordinated with the Prime Minister and that caused concern among Bulgaria's partners in NATO and the EU.

As the invasion of Ukraine got underway, Yanev said the media was using the word “war” too freely. Subsequent attempts to clarify his position brought him further criticism. “There's no need for Bulgaria to have a pro-Russian, pro-US or pro-European position: Bulgaria should and is obliged to demonstrate that it can put national interests first,” Yanev wrote in a lengthy Facebook post on February 27th.

In a televised statement on the morning of February 28, Prime Minister Petkov said that the resignation of Yanev should be asked because the Defence Minister had stated his own individual policies on Facebook, had claimed that his remaining in office was key to the stability of the government, and had declined to acknowledge that the invasion of Ukraine by Putin's Russia was a war. Bulgarian Prime minister's argument was that his “defense minister cannot use the word “operation” instead of “war”.

After the matter was discussed by the politicians from the ruling coalition, an extraordinary session of parliament was convened to vote on the resignation of Yanev and the election of his successor.

Asides from his comments on how to refer to the war, Yanev wrote on Facebook that calls for his resignation “put at risk national security”. The Defense Minister explained that the attacks had the goal of replacing him with someone who would be more cooperative in promoting foreign interests in Bulgaria. This, he added, would have “dangerous” consequences for the country, and he remained adamant he would not step down. “Don’t expect me to resign in this geopolitical situation”, Yanev wrote.

At its extraordinary sitting, the National Assembly accepted the resignation of Defense Minister Stefan Yanev and voted the election of the new Defense Minister proposed by the Prime Minister. A sharp discussion in the plenary hall provoked the fact that minutes before the extraordinary session of the parliament began, the ruling coalition suddenly changed the name of the nominee for the new Minister of Defense. The name proposed the previous day by Kiril Petkov was replaced by another at the last moment. The opposition saw in this act tension in the coalition.

At first the Prime minister said that his centrist coalition government would ask parliament to appoint as a new Defense minister professor Todor Tagarev, who was a caretaker defense minister in 2013. From 2005 to 2008, Tagarev was a member of the NATO Research and Technology Board. However, just before the Parliament sitting it became clear that the coalition partners couldn’t endorse Tagarev and the Prime Minister put forward the name of Bulgaria’s ambassador to NATO, Dragomir Zakov.

The last-minute change of candidate caused some degree of surprise and confusion, and apparently was the result of the Bulgarian Socialist Party, a partner in the quadripartite governing coalition, objecting to the Tagarev candidacy and reportedly threatening to quit the ruling coalition if it proceeded.

Finally Bulgarian MPs unanimously voted the change of Stefan Yanev with Dragomir Zakov. From 2004 to 2008 he was a member of the Bulgarian delegation to NATO and was a member of Bulgaria’s mission to the UN.

Zakov became Bulgaria's permanent representative to NATO in 2019 and occupied this position until now.

The debate on the change of Defense Minister largely widened into one on Putin's war on Ukraine, which last week was condemned in a declaration by six of the seven parliamentary groups, although the BSP declined to back sanctions against Russia.

The pro-Kremlin Vuzrazhdane party – the smallest group in Bulgaria's National Assembly, with 13 MPs in the 240-seat National Assembly – used the debate to attack Bulgaria's membership of NATO, and called for the resignation of the entire government.

### **Stefan Yanev's new political project**

An interesting political development after the dismissal of Stefan Yanev from the government was the surprising announcement that he intend to make his own new political project. According to some media reports, General Stefan Yanev's new political project will be called "Greater Bulgaria" and will be a kind of patriotic party.

According to political analysts, there is a political disintegration of some formations in the ruling coalition, which could lead to new early parliamentary elections soon. In such case, according to opinion polls, a new political party led by Stefan Yanev has a great chance to win the trust of many Bulgarian voters.

According to some Bulgarian political analysts, there is reason to believe that among the members of the BSP there is a serious interest in the political project being prepared by Yanev. The reason is that many members of the Socialist Party are disappointed with the party's continuing internal split and desperately poor results, which the BSP made in the last parliamentary elections.

In addition, according to sociologists in the political spectrum, there is already a space for a new political project - a party or a political movement. This is so first, because the ratings of “There is such a people”, of the “Bulgarian Socialist”, “Party and of Democratic Bulgaria have been reduced twice. There is also a very significant reduction in the GERB rating. Formally, a high rating of "We continue the change" and Kiril Petkov is maintained, but due to a number of conflicts in the ruling coalition and contradictory actions of the government related to the national interests, this rating may soon be dropped down.

Stefan Yanev's explanation for his removal from the cabinet is related to the fact that there is a deep misunderstanding between him and Prime Minister Kiril Petkov about the national interest and how to protect it.

Regarding Bulgaria's relations with NATO and the EU, Yanev clarified that there is a generation of people in Bulgaria who are not used to and are not able to protect Bulgarian national interests in the best way. In his opinion, instead of making full use of these international alliances, they make it easier to take the common decisions that often serve someone else's interests. That is why, according to Yanev, the main task of the Bulgarian political representation today, the fundamental responsibility of the political elite is to adequately protect the national interest of Bulgaria. The national interest is what guarantees the freedom, security and well-being of Bulgarian citizens. What helps them preserve their national identity and statehood.

## **Conclusions**

Although not a member of any party, Yanev is close to Bulgarian President Rumen Radev. President Radev has criticized the removal of Yanev.

“The replacement of the defense minister in the midst of a military crisis in the region is a risk for which the ruling coalition is responsible,” Radev commented.

Protesters in Sofia also demanded that Yanev stay in his post, arguing that the ministerial change could entangle Bulgaria in the conflict.

"In the election of a minister, the majority must be guided by the understanding of sovereignty, professional competence and ability to defend the Bulgarian interest," the head of state underlined.

The President commented that he expects the government to intensify work on measures to reduce the consequences of the impending crisis. "From strengthening security in energy to guaranteeing food sovereignty.

The Russian invasion of Ukraine caused the first serious shock in Bulgaria's ruling coalition. The foreign policy factor causes domestic political tensions in the country's governance.

Yanev's firing shows the deep internal divisions in the government which only took office in December. Since the Russian attack on Ukraine, it has become increasingly difficult for the Prime Minister Petkov to moderate tensions between members of his coalition - pro-Russian socialists and pro-Western reformers. The Socialists voted in both the Bulgarian and European parliaments to oppose sanctions against Russia and the banning of the Russian state media.

The foreign policy factor, which totally and completely dominates the political space, threatens further and more serious domestic political contradictions in the Bulgarian ruling coalition, which could lead to destabilization of the country's government.

# **The Government's Minister Arrested: the Cabinet Reshuffle or Early Elections in Croatia? (March)**

**Nikica Kolar**

## **Summary**

The arrest of Minister Darko Horvat and the criminal investigation of other members of the government by the authorities have brought the government into a serious crisis. Parts of the opposition parties are demanding early elections, while the ruling majority insist that early elections will not take place. The total destabilization of the ruling coalition was stopped by the event of Russian aggression against Ukraine. In light of new global circumstances, the cabinet reshuffle is a much more likely scenario than early elections.

## **Introduction**

On Saturday, February 19, 2022, early in the morning, the police arrested the Minister of Physical Planning, Construction and State Assets, Darko Horvat. It was completely unexpected for the public, because it is not usual that ministers are being arrested, especially during weekends. USKOK<sup>1</sup> accuses Horvat of illegally granting subsidies to particular small entrepreneurs while he was a Minister of Economy, Entrepreneurship and Crafts during the term of the previous Andrej Plenković's government (2016-2020). Horvat is under USKOK's suspicion when his former assistant Ana Mandac, arrested a year and a half ago in a corruption scandal, testified before investigators about Minister Horvat's criminal actions in allocating funds to small entrepreneurs. According to USKOK, Mandac's

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<sup>1</sup> USKOK is the Croatian abbreviation for the Office for the Suppression of Corruption and Organised Crime.

testimony was the main evidence for Horvat's arrest<sup>1</sup>. In addition, Minister Horvat is not the only member of the Government under investigation by USKOK. According to unofficial media sources (and these unofficial sources are almost always official sources distributed intentionally to the media), USKOK suspects Minister of Labour, Pension System, Family and Social Policy Josip Aladrović, Deputy Prime Minister Boris Milošević and former Minister of Agriculture Tomislav Tolušić. Milošević and Tolušić are charged by USKOK with lobbying staff in the Ministry of Economy, Entrepreneurship and Crafts to illegally allocate funds to certain small entrepreneurs, while Aladrović is accused of illegally employing when he was managing the Croatian Pension Insurance Institute<sup>2</sup>.

The arrest of Minister Horvat and the questioning of other members of the government call into question the stability of Plenković's government, which will have to be resolved in the short term by either cabin reshuffle or calling snap elections. When it comes to calling early parliamentary elections, the opposition is completely divided, as many opposition parties are not ready and consolidated enough to run in the new elections. Also, given the new global circumstances affected by Russia's aggression against Ukraine, the opposition's harsh criticism of the government and media attention to corruption scandals have pushed into the background. The cabinet reshuffle is a much more likely outcome than early elections.

### **The arrest of Minister Horvat and the Prime Minister's critique of the State Attorney's work**

In Croatia, weekends are usually devoid of intense political content, so the arrest of Minister Horvat was a big surprise for both the minister and the general public. PM Plenković especially considered Horvat's arrest very

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<sup>1</sup> [Police searching home of Croatian Construction Minister Darko Horvat - N1 \(n1info.com\)](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Cure detalji istrage: Evo za što USKOK sumnjiči Horvata, Tolušića, Aladrovića i Miloševića – NACIONAL.HR](#)



suspicious, given that the arrest took place in the week when Plenković achieved a very important diplomatic success in significantly extending the Croatia's deadline for using EU funds for reconstruction and recovery. That is why PM Plenković characterized the arrest of Minister Horvat as odd and telling, and thus implied that the State Attorney's Office (DORH<sup>1</sup>) deliberately sabotaged the success of his government for political reasons<sup>2</sup>. In other words, PM Plenković claims that the DORH is not independent and that it acts politically biased, that is, that the DORH acts against its constitutional role. The paradox of Plenković's criticism was quickly noticed by the opposition, who claimed that it was Plenković who was attacking the independence of the DORH<sup>3</sup>.

However, the timing of the arrest is really interesting, because it happened a few days after the PM Plenković's statement that no one will force him to remove any more ministers until the end of his term, and the day before the arrest, and Minister of Culture and Media Nina Obuljen Koržinek said on national private television channel N1 Zagreb that people should be happy that there are no charlatans in power, defending Minister Horvat and the rest of the Government from criticism that the project to rebuild the areas affected by the earthquake has done very poorly so far. Following criticism of the slow pace of reconstruction, the opposition saw Minister Horvat the most responsible for slowness of the reconstruction process, primarily because of its own incompetence<sup>4</sup>. Opposition parties tried to demand Minister Horvat's removal through parliament, but PM Plenković categorically defended Minister Horvat from the opposition until the last minute. When USKOK arrested Minister Horvat, Plenković soon relieved Horvat of his post as Minister of Construction. Has the DORH really conspired against PM Plenković? It is not yet possible to determine, but it is certainly an indicative timing that in the week when the Government has

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<sup>1</sup>Croatian abbreviation for State Attorney of the Republic of Croatia (Državno odvjetništvo Republike Hrvatske).

<sup>2</sup> [PM: Timing of Construction Minister's arrest is odd - N1 \(n1info.com\)](#)

<sup>3</sup> [Left-liberal opposition calls for snap election - N1 \(n1info.com\)](#)

<sup>4</sup> [The Price of Poor Reconstruction: United Opposition against 'the Most Incompetent' Minister – China-CEE Institute](#)

significant successes and when the PM is frantically defending the Minister from the criticism of the opposition, the Minister is arrested on Saturday morning. Even President Milanović himself, who has often shown in public that he is not politically inclined to PM Plenković, has expressed doubts about the work of the DORH, arguing that the DORH reacted too independently towards a person with immunity against criminal procedures.

### **Cabinet reshuffle or snap elections**

Since the Minister Horvat was arrested and taken into custody, and two other members of the government — Minister Aladrović and Deputy Prime Minister Milošević — are under criminal investigation by USKOK, the question is what will happen to Andrej Plenković's government. PM Plenković has insisted since the arrest of Minister Horvat that there will be no early elections, while some opposition parties are calling for early elections. However, not all opposition parties are united in the position of calling early elections, because some more relevant opposition parties have not consolidated their organizations and are thus not ready for any elections soon. Precisely for this reason the Minister Obuljen stated very confidently that the opposition prays to God that there will be no early elections<sup>1</sup>.

Less than a week after Minister Horvat's arrest, the Russian aggression against Ukraine began and all domestic politics was overshadowed by events in Ukraine. In the meantime, the search for a new Minister of Construction has begun and the immunity of Minister Aladrović has been lifted, but since the new Russian-Ukrainian war, the opposition no longer insists so much on new early elections. It is increasingly likely that PM Plenković will still decide to reshuffle the cabinet, to reduce the negative image of the Government in public opinion by removing some ministers from their posts. For the new Minister of Construction the government and the parliament gave support to Ivan Paladina, a nonpartisan manager and,

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<sup>1</sup> [Obuljen Koržinek oporbi: Mole Boga da ne bude izbora i da dvije godine pokušaju još nešto napraviti na svom imidžu i rejtingu - tportal](#)

in the midst of Russophobia, already classified as a “Russian player”, due to his long-term business relations with the Russian entrepreneurs<sup>1</sup>.

### **Conclusion: Russia's aggression against Ukraine saved Plenković's government from early elections**

The arrest of Minister Horvat was a turning point in contemporary Croatian politics and a completely legitimate reason for requesting snap elections. In addition to that, the DORH's investigation against two other members of the government, Plenković's second term was indeed on the verge of early elections. On Saturday, February 19, the political process of destabilizing the government was launched, and on February 24, with Russia's aggression against Ukraine, it was almost completely marginalized. The misfortune of Ukraine was parliamentary fortune for Andrej Plenković. There is no more talk of early elections; the whole of Europe, including the Croatian public, turned its attention to the events in Ukraine and every EU member state is trying to politically respond to security risks coming from Ukraine. Complete destabilization of the Croatian government is no longer an option. The unity of the parliamentary majority and the opposition is shown in the expression of solidarity towards Ukraine<sup>2</sup>. The turbulent times in domestic politics for PM Plenković's second term have temporarily disappeared.

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<sup>1</sup> [Opposition MPs slam new cabinet minister over alleged ties to Russian oligarchs - N1 \(n1info.com\)](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Parliament session kicks off with emotional show of support for Ukraine - N1 \(n1info.com\)](#)

# **Migration Crisis and Czech Political Strategy (May)**

**Ladislav Zemánek**

## **Summary**

In response to the Ukrainian crisis, more than 300,000 refugees have crossed the Czech border, predominantly women and children. Around 10 per cent of them have started to work legally. By mid-April, the Czechs sent more than 3.4 billion CZK (138 million EUR) to the Ukraine, thus becoming the third most generous donor globally. Similarly, the Czech Government has adopted a very active policy together with adjacent Poland. In internal terms, the cabinet passed the strategic priorities for coping with the migration crisis in April. This political framework is going to be continuously updated in relation to the development in the Ukraine as well as negotiations with the EU authorities.

## **Introduction**

The Czech Republic has belonged to one of the most affected countries as far as the influx of refugees from the Ukraine is concerned. Unlike the migration crisis of 2015, the Czech population is supportive of accepting refugees and a wide array of people have been active in providing financial means, accommodation, food, clothing and other kinds of material aid to the Ukrainians. The current migration crisis has thus contributed to a substantial change in the image of the country and its people who have been quite often seen as xenophobic, intolerant and self-interested as a result of the critical attitudes during the 2015 migration crisis, typical of a strong reluctance to accept refugees from Africa and the Near East.

## **Historical parallels and present interpretations**

The Czech Government has responded in an active manner to immigration, preparing an ambitious plan to support and integrate the refugees into the Czech society. In a sense, such an openness resembles the generous Russian Aid Action (*Русская акция помощи*) from the 1920s and 1930s, within which the Czechoslovak state not only accepted but also invited refugees from the former Russian Empire who were running away from their motherland after the Bolshevik revolution and bloody civil war. The initiative was put forward particularly by President Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk, an author of a three-volume monograph about Russian philosophy, and the first Czechoslovak Prime Minister Karel Kramář, an Orthodox Christian and leading conservative politician who got married to a Russian in Crimea, having strong ties with Russia. It is worth noticing that Czechoslovakia provided more financial means to the refugees than all other countries together. Prague was one of the most important centres of the Russian emigration in the inter-war period (together with Berlin, Paris, Belgrade and Harbin) and not a few leading intellectuals or artists lived in Bohemia. Not by coincidence, Prague was sometimes called the „Russian Oxford“.<sup>1</sup>

It is, therefore, not surprising that the unique action conducted by the Czechoslovak authorities emerged in the public discourse in response to the crisis in the Ukraine and consequent migration crisis, all the more that the Russian Aid Action had been launched in 1921 so some events commemorating the centenary were held last year. At the same time, however, false interpretations and parallels have been used. Probably the most important one is equating the then migration from the former Russian Empire with the current influx. The roots, reasons and circumstances of both migrations are completely different. The present attempts to equate the Russian leadership headed by Vladimir Putin with the Soviets, accusing Russia of „Soviet-like expansionism“ or „genocide“ are misleading and ahistorical. Similarly, the difference between the Russian Civil War in the first years of the Soviet rule on the one hand, and today's conflict in the

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<sup>1</sup> Savický, I. (1999). *Osudová setkání: Češi v Rusku a Rusové v Čechách 1914-1938*. Praha: Academia.

Ukraine is obvious. The ahistorical parallels are drawn by those whose thinking fossilised in the Cold War century with its outmoded concept of totalitarianism. The present supporters of the totalitarian school can then see no difference between the Soviet model and the existing Russian illiberal democracy. Such a one-sided perspective has permeated the official discourse, being reproduced by the political representatives.<sup>1</sup>

The huge dissimilarity also lies in the social and class character of the migrations. The inter-war migration was exclusive and typical of a considerable proportion of higher-class members while the present one is mass and characteristic of a high share of women and children, middle and lower class people. Whereas the Czechoslovak authorities including President Masaryk designed the Russian Aid Action as a supportive project for a temporary period before the emigrants' return to Russia, the incumbent cabinet seemingly expects a long-term integration process of the Ukrainians, thus encouraging the opinions, according to which many Ukrainian people only made use of Russia's military operation to leave the most corrupt country in Europe and start a new life in the EU.<sup>2</sup> It is utterly important to define the state priorities and a long-term policy towards the Ukrainians in the Czech Republic. Some of them will undoubtedly return to their homeland but up to several hundreds of thousands of them will probably stay in the country. In this case, the state authorities and political

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<sup>1</sup> *Putin věří v sovětský mýtus, nesmí to projít, "řekl Lipavský ve Washingtonu* (2022, April 27). Echo24.cz. <https://echo24.cz/a/SmhjF/putin-veri-v-sovetsky-mytus-nesmi-to-projit-rekl-lipavsky-ve-washingtonu>. *Akt agrese, 'bratrská pomoc'. ,Na Putinově šachovnici jsme i my, ' reagují čeští politici na postup Ruska* (2022, February 21). iROZHLAS. [https://www.irozhlas.cz/zpravy-domov/petr-fiala-ukrajina-putin-zenisek-pavel-fischer-cerenochova-marketa-pekarova\\_2202212217\\_jgr](https://www.irozhlas.cz/zpravy-domov/petr-fiala-ukrajina-putin-zenisek-pavel-fischer-cerenochova-marketa-pekarova_2202212217_jgr). Hübscherová, T. (2022, February 21). *Putin chce obnovit SSSR, čas na sankce, píší politici. Fiala deklaroval, že ČR stojí za Ukrajinou*. Forum24. <https://www.forum24.cz/putin-chce-obnovit-sssr-cas-na-sankce-pisi-politici-fiala-deklaroval-ze-cr-stoji-za-ukrajinou/>.

<sup>2</sup> Bullough, O. (2015, February 06). *Welcome to Ukraine, the most corrupt nation in Europe*. The Guardian. <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2015/feb/04/welcome-to-the-most-corrupt-nation-in-europe-ukraine>.

representation must find a balanced strategy not to give preferential treatment to the Ukrainians to the detriment of the Czech citizens.

### **Majority-minority relations**

The initial mass public support for the refugees is gradually being replaced by more realistic attitudes. According to opinion polls from the first weeks of the crisis, up to 85 per cent of people believed that the Czech Republic was to accept refugees. At the same time, less than 30 per cent expressed the willingness to provide them with accommodation. A vast majority of the respondents were in favour of financial and material assistance to both the refugees and the Ukraine itself. Around 50 per cent supported the introduction of economic sanctions against Russia as well as military supplies to Kiev. However, a mere 13 per cent would have agreed with the direct military involvement in the conflict.<sup>1</sup> The predominantly positive attitude has been adopted by employers. The point is that the Ukrainians could at least partially resolve the long-term problem of the labour shortage which can be observed first of all in the primary sector. Moreover, the Czech business has a rich experience with the Ukrainian workers who have become indispensable in some industries, for example, construction.

According to the 2021 census, the Ukrainians constitute the biggest minority in the Czech Republic. The long-term coexistence of the Czechs and Ukrainians helps to explain the current social atmosphere which is well disposed towards the acceptance of refugees and their integration into the majority society. Interestingly, nearly 70 per cent of people believe that the Ukrainians have a similar or better work ethic compared to the Czechs. It follows that the Czech society does not have a tendency to perceive the Ukrainians as „parasites“ who abuse state social benefits (while the

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<sup>1</sup> *Přijímání uprchlíků z Ukrajiny podporuje 85 procent Čechů. Domů by je vzala třetina* (2022, March 09). Aktuálně.cz. <https://zpravy.aktualne.cz/domaci/prijimani-uprchliku-z-ukrajiny-podporuje-85-procent-cechu/r~ab51fe2e9fb611ec8a24ac1f6b220ee8/>.



opposite perception applies to the Gypsies or the African refugees).<sup>1</sup> Positive sentiments then spill over into the active support. By mid-April, the Czechs sent no less than 3.4 billion CZK (138 million EUR), from which more than 1 billion CZK (40 million EUR) was received by the Ukrainian embassy in Prague. These financial means were used for purchases of military equipment for the Ukrainian army and militias.<sup>2</sup> From a comparative perspective, the Czech support is the third-highest after that of Britain and the Netherlands.<sup>3</sup>

### Political strategy

As of May 05, the Czech Ministry of the Interior granted 328,511 emergency visas to the refugees from the Ukraine.<sup>4</sup> Officially, the population in the country increased from 10,516,707 by the end of 2021 to 10,845,218. However, the real figure might be higher. The Government has made the administrative and legal proceedings easier to speed up the stabilisation and integration of the refugees. Those with emergency visas thus need not apply for job permission. More than 34,000 refugees found legal employment by the end of April. Among the job applicants, nevertheless, only 25 per cent are university graduates whereas 42 per cent completed secondary education and 33 per cent the primary one. Most of them seek shorter-term employment.<sup>5</sup> The number of job applicants,

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<sup>1</sup> Špačková, I., Borový, A. (2022, March 25). *Češi sice Ukrajince vítají, ale pomáhat nechtějí dlouho.* Seznam Zprávy. <https://www.seznamzpravy.cz/clanek/ekonomika-firmy-cesi-sice-ukrajince-vitaji-ale-pomahat-nychteji-dlouho-195333>.

<sup>2</sup> *Češi vybrali na Ukrajinu přes tři miliardy, z toho třetinu na zbraně* (2022, April 17). České noviny. <https://www.ceskenoviny.cz/zpravy/cesi-vybrali-na-ukrajinu-pres-tri-miliardy-z-toho-tretinu-na-zbrane/2193621>.

<sup>3</sup> Švec, P., Doubravová, B. (2022, April 19). *Přehledně: Kde potřebují pomoc dobrovolníků. Češi jsou na Ukrajině třetí nejštědřejší.* Aktuálně.cz. <https://zpravy.aktualne.cz/domaci/vlna-pomoci-cesky-cerveny-kriz-inzerat-pro-dobrovolniky-jak/r~e14bd8fe9eb911eca06bac1f6b220ee8/>.

<sup>4</sup> *How many Ukrainians have fled their homes and where have they gone?* (2022, May 07). BBC. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-60555472>.

<sup>5</sup> Vaničková, K. (2022, May 03). *Přes 34 tisíc uprchlíků už našlo v Česku práci. Často jako dělníci či pomocníci.* iDNES.cz.

nevertheless, remains very low given the total number of refugees in the country.

On April 13, the Government approved the strategic priorities for coping with the migration crisis including the establishment of the position of national coordinator. The post is temporarily occupied by the Minister of the Interior Vít Rakušan. The cabinet expects that the expenditures needed for immediate handling of the crisis amount to 54 billion CZK (1.33 billion EUR). It will require the adjustment of the 2022 state budget. At the same time, the Government has initiated negotiations with the European Commission to get financial support from the EU referring to the fact that the Czech Republic is one of the most affected member states. The strategic document is divided into 13 priority areas among which the highest costs are related to the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs.<sup>1</sup>

## Conclusion

The cabinet has elaborated three basic scenarios of the possible development as far as the Ukrainian and migration crises are concerned. The first scenario is based upon the assumption that the influx has already ended and the situation is being stabilised. The second one anticipates the escalation of the conflict in Eastern Ukraine that would lead to the rise of the number of refugees to 600,000 persons. The worst scenario expects the expansion of conflict to the whole territory of the Ukraine and the influx of up to 1 million people to the Czech Republic.<sup>2</sup> It is beyond any doubt that in such a case social instability could become a reality.

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[https://www.idnes.cz/zpravy/domaci/urad-prace-uprchlici-z-ukrajiny-hledani-zamestnani-vyplacene-prispevky.A220503\\_070111\\_domaci\\_vank](https://www.idnes.cz/zpravy/domaci/urad-prace-uprchlici-z-ukrajiny-hledani-zamestnani-vyplacene-prispevky.A220503_070111_domaci_vank).

<sup>1</sup> *Vláda Vláda schválila priority zvládnání migrace, chce o nich dál diskutovat* (2022, April 13). České noviny. <https://www.ceskenoviny.cz/zpravy/vlada-schvalila-priority-zvladani-migrace-chce-o-nich-dal-diskutovat/2189157>.

<sup>2</sup> *Stanovení strategických priorit Vlády ČR ke zvládnání uprchlické vlny související s invazí Ruské federace na Ukrajinu* (2022, April 13). Ministerstvo vnitra ČR. <https://www.mvcr.cz/soubor/stanoveni-strategickych-priorit-vlady-pdf.aspx>.



## Heading into Summertime with a New Government (May)

### E-MAP Foundation MTÜ

By the end of May, Estonia's *intra*-political turbulence successfully as well as effectively got to its logical breakthrough – a *secret de Polichinelle* revealed itself before the actuality. In a less metaphorical way of saying, the first cabinet of Kaja Kallas was about to become history. Objectively, the 'centrists-reformists' coalition was on paper still 'alive', but the Prime Minister's party, as it was noted by its official in the *Riigikogu*, "essentially [started] ruling as a minority government"<sup>1</sup> after all the political 'pots' were smashed with the *Centre Party* over the broadly discussed bill that was supposed to raise family benefits. The political nature of the break-up (already discussed in the previous brief) is not that simple, but, with necessity, the conflict needed to get to its finale.

It cannot be a clearer message from the Prime Minister than what Kaja Kallas outlined for the media – if the 'centrists' proposed the bill without discussing it within the coalition, then "the coalition would no longer function in its existing form, though added this was not an ultimatum either, simply a new political reality"<sup>2</sup>. The process of searching for an additional 'basket' with EUR 300 million per year when the newest supplementary budget of EUR 800 million was adopted very recently would seem to be very challenging. Then why bother to keep such a partner? In a couple of days after expressing the aforementioned doubts about the 'durability' of her first Government, Kaja Kallas went ahead for an interview to not deny a claim that the process of forming her second cabinet had begun:

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<sup>1</sup> 'Reform chief whip: Essentially a minority government in Estonia right now' in *ERR*, 31 May 2022. Available from [<https://news.err.ee/1608614755/reform-chief-whip-essentially-a-minority-government-in-estonia-right-now>].

<sup>2</sup> Kaja Kallas as cited in 'Reform chief whip: Essentially a minority government in Estonia right now'.

No one else can make that decision on the *Centre Party*'s behalf. It seems as though they are demonstrating with their actions that they want to be in the opposition, but they dare not say so. I hope that the *Centre Party* is working on self-reflection and that they make up their minds about what they want to be. [...] Coalitions are never formed via the media. Coalitions can be broken up in minutes, but they take significantly longer to form. [...] These discussions aren't held via the media. [...] Naturally everyone is discussing all remotely possible situations. But truly, these discussions and consultations are not held via the media.<sup>1</sup>

The post-24 February 2022 *intra*-political situation in Estonia brought the 'reformists', the already leading the ranks major parliamentary party of the current Prime Minister, on the undisputed top, if compared to the list of the other majors and minors. The party's unconditional support of Ukraine in its fight against the brutal aggressor from the east positively resonated with the hearts and minds of many Estonian voters. The leader of the 'reformists', the Prime Minister, became more mature (to fact internal disputes and deliberations), while dramatically rising her international profile in global media. The way Kaja Kallas responded to the operational challenge of receiving tens of thousands of Ukrainian war refugees who arrived in Estonia amass in the course of a few weeks made her name (as a skilful manager, this time) in Brussels – one may argue that the bureaucrats of the EU's main bodies realised that a new political star has been 'born' in the Baltics/Nordics. All these and some other factors were crucial for Prime Minister Kallas in the process of weighing up her political party's chances to lead yet another Government under the same leadership, straight after the prospective collapse of her first cabinet. It did not take long, and

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<sup>1</sup> Kaja Kallas as cited in Madis Hindre, 'Kallas doesn't deny claim about forming new ruling coalition' in *ERR*, 2 June 2022. Available from [<https://news.err.ee/1608617293/interview-kallas-doesn-t-deny-claim-about-forming-new-ruling-coalition>].

within the first week of June the decision was made – Kaja Kallas dismissed the junior coalitional partner (the *Centre Party*) and its ministers (seven in total) from the Government, paving the way for building up her second cabinet:

Estonia, now more than ever before, needs a functioning government based on common values. The security situation in Europe does not give me any opportunity to continue cooperating with the *Centre Party*, which is unable to put Estonia's interests above those of the party and its various factions. [...] I believed that February 24 and Russia's genocide in Ukraine had opened every *Riigikogu* party's eyes to just how important it is, from the point of view Estonian independence, to have a common understanding of threats as a neighbo[u]r of Russia. Unfortunately, it turned out [...] that there are two parties in the parliament that just cannot shape up, even in the current situation, and make sure our independence and constitutional values are protected.<sup>1</sup>

Via his social media, the *status quo* was immediately confirmed by the country's President Alar Karis, who noted that “[w]hile Estonia still has a government, it does not have a functioning coalition”<sup>2</sup>. The basic point that the Head of State formulated here was that Estonia does not have plenty of time (and, literally, should not have any desire) to be have any kind of minor instability, let alone a major crisis, in the executive side of the political equation. The global situation as well as the geo-strategic

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<sup>1</sup> Kaja Kallas as cited in ‘Estonian prime minister dismisses junior coalition partner from government’, *ERR*, 3 June 2022. Available from [<https://news.err.ee/1608618850/estonian-prime-minister-dismisses-junior-coalition-partner-from-government>].

<sup>2</sup> Alar Karis as cited in ‘President Karis: During a crisis, Estonia needs a functioning coalition’, *ERR*, 3 June 2022. Available from [<https://news.err.ee/1608618397/president-karis-during-a-crisis-estonia-needs-a-functioning-coalition>].

challenges of monumental significance that are getting closer to the Estonian sovereign territory – these are the main solidifying elements for the Estonian political elites to quickly get back into business after a short period of, generally, perceived relaxation.

Thus, without any delay, Prime Minister Kallas approached the leaders of ‘social democrats’ and *Pro Patria* (the oppositional parties during the existence of Kaja Kallas’ first cabinet) to talk about forming a new governmental coalition. As reported, back then, Lauri Läänemets of the ‘social democrats’ noted that “he had spoken to Prime Minister Kaja Kallas [...], adding that the *Reform Party* was now awaiting his party to formally propose coalition talks [and that] Estonia needs a well-functioning government, which is ‘Estonia-centric and pro-European’”<sup>1</sup>. As for the other prospective member of the then yet-to-be-formed coalition, *Pro Patria*, its leader Helir-Valdor Seeder, stated that his “party was ready to negotiate with all those parties who had received parliamentary mandates, though qualified that he was concerned about the way in which the [P]rime [M]inister had disbanded the *Reform-Centre* coalition”<sup>2</sup>. Interestingly enough, more than two decades ago, Estonia had already seen the same configuration of the Government, but it was then *Pro Patria* and its leader Dr. Mart Laar who were driving the process towards the formation of Laar’s second cabinet (March 1999 – January 2002).

As a result of the current round of negotiations, it took about six weeks for the three parties to finally reach an agreement to establish yet another Reform/Pro Patria/SDE governmental coalition, but this time it would enter

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<sup>1</sup> Lauri Läänemets as cited in ‘Prime minister approaches SDE, Isamaa leaders on potential coalition talks’, *ERR*, 3 June 2022. Available from [<https://news.err.ee/1608618988/prime-minister-approaches-sde-isamaa-leaders-on-potential-coalition-talks>].

<sup>2</sup> Helir-Valdor Seeder as cited in in ‘Prime minister approaches SDE, Isamaa leaders on potential coalition talks’.



the records as the second cabinet of Kaja Kallas. On the normative side, in general, the coalitional agreement documented the signatories' intention to productively survive as a working governing body until the next parliamentary elections. On a concrete note, there are few important policy-shaping clusters, which the document is featured by, and they are as follows. **Firstly**, the Russo-Ukrainian Warwar is recognised as a conflict that is to “exacerbate the social, economic and social tensions caused by the coronavirus and price increases”, therefore, “[i]n order to reduce the above-mentioned effects, [the coalition] aim to mitigate the rise in the price of energy carriers and to ensure a better coping of Estonian families”<sup>1</sup>.

**Secondly**, the new Government agrees that “Estonia must be fully protected, especially taking into account that our neighbouring Russian Federation acts as an aggressor and violates all international rules”. **Thirdly**, the coalition will aim at completing the transition to Estonian-language education by 2030, and, keeping this goal in mind, by 1 November 2022, the new Government will push for the adaptation of the Act on the transition to Estonian-language studies in kindergartens and primary schools (visualising this transition in three phases). **Fourthly**, Estonia is to “accelerate the transition to renewable electricity and aim to produce the same amount of renewable electricity in Estonia in 2030 as our total annual consumption”, ensuring the establishment of the country’s LNG reception capacity and thinking of a decision to make on banning “the purchase of gas from Russia”. **Fifthly**, from 1 October, there is a plan “to adopt the amendments to the Electricity Market Act, which will create an opportunity for domestic consumers to purchase electricity as a universal service”. And **finally**, considering the level of inflation in the country, the new Government agreed to plan for raising “the income tax-free minimum to EUR 654 per month”, while trying to extend “the current rate of excise

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<sup>1</sup> ‘Estonia’s new coalition agreement’ in *ERR*, 19 July 2022. Available from [<https://news.err.ee/1608660640/estonia-s-new-coalition-agreement>].

duty on electricity, fuel and special diesel until 1 April 2024”.<sup>1</sup> Having signed this coalitional agreement, the second cabinet of Kaja Kallas went ahead, calming down some relative turbulence in the field of Estonia’s internal politics. It was much needed as the country has plenty of external challenges to fact, but it is a completely different story.

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<sup>1</sup> ‘Estonia’s new coalition agreement’.

# **The Political Dialogue in Greece in the Light of the Russian Invasion of Ukraine (March)**

**Evelyn Karakatsani**

## **Summary**

The briefing presents the political dialogue in Greece on the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The government needs to take serious decisions on issues of external relations and determine policies for dealing with both the humanitarian and the economic crisis. All Greek parties are against the war, however the political debate on the government's strategies is strong.

## **Introduction**

The Russian invasion of Ukraine has triggered the political dialogue in Greece. The government openly took side by condemning the attack of Russia and following the strategies of NATO and EU. During the high-level meeting in the parliament the government announced its decisions, and the opposition parties had the chance to present their views. Evidently, all the opposition parties are in line with the International Law and against the war. However, with the exception of KINAL, all the other opposition parties strongly criticized the government for its decision to send defense supplies to Ukraine and declared their demand of not been involved to the war.

## **The high-level meeting in the Hellenic Parliament on Ukraine**

On the 1<sup>st</sup> March 2022, a high-level meeting took place in the Hellenic Parliament, according to the Article 142A of the Rules of Procedure of the Parliament, in order for the government to inform all the parties on its position and policies concerning the Russian invasion of Ukraine, as well as potential implications for the country.

The Greek PM opened his speech by declaring that President Putin's decision is a clear violation of the Charter of the United Nations and of universally accepted rules for resolving transnational disputes by peaceful means, which causes thousands of innocent victims, including the Greeks in Mariupol. He also added that the Russian invasion aims to forcibly change the architectural security in Europe, which is also evident by the Russian President's threats to Sweden, to Finland. The PM continued by highlighting that Greece's position to this crisis is the outcome of the history of the nation as well as the geopolitical choices of the country throughout the years. Mitsotakis stated that the nation was always at the right side of history and recalled the phrase told by Konstantinos Karamanlis in 1974 "we belong to the West". He added that not only we belong to the West, but we are also the West and belong to freedom, to democracy and to international legitimacy.

Furthermore, the Greek PM recited the EU sanctions against Russia, namely excluding Russia from the international trading and payment system, freezing all the assets of the country's political and economic nomenclature abroad and prohibiting access to state-of-the-art technologies. All these will result in the increase of borrowing cost and inflation, which is a big hit to Russia's industrial economy. At the same time, the export ban will undermine the country's energy sector, which is the main feeder of its economy. Moreover, the trade embargo, will inevitably hit the different sectors of the Russian production system. In addition, Mitsotakis made clear that if Greece does not present practical solidarity in a country that is under armed attack, Greece will not have the moral strength to ask for the support of the West in a future case scenario of a possible attack to the Greek territory.

Concerning the humanitarian crisis and the expected refugee waves he called on the dozens of Non-Governmental Organizations to be active for this present emergency. He continued by referring to the recent criticism towards the government for acquiring Rafale aircrafts and Belharra frigates. Lastly, he mentioned that the current crisis, as well as the EU sanctions will disrupt the international market. However, Greece has the ability to manage

the later both in national and European level. At the national level, the government is already organized in terms of household support costs. In addition, concerning the maintenance of adequate reserves in the energy sector, the PM mentioned that in January Greece covered 47% of domestic demand with LNG from Revythousa and 20% through the TAP pipeline. Russian share was reduced to 33%, and the country intends to proceed, with private funds, to build a second LNG receiving station, the FSRU in Alexandroupolis. Nevertheless, the PM stressed that a pan-European problem requires a pan-European solution, by creating a common EU fund to support businesses and households and establishing common policies on the energy sector (1).

The leader of the major opposition party SYRIZA followed with his speech. Mr. Tsipras criticized the government mainly on the decision to send military aid to Ukraine. He argued that "any signal that Greece may be part of the engagement and not the solution is wrong and weakens us". He especially criticized the PM for "joined forces with some EU countries that came forward in a bilateral context, but not in the framework of collective decisions, to proceed with sending of military equipment" and suggested that it would have been a better decision for the country to send only humanitarian aid and non-lethal equipment, as Spain and Italy did. Moreover, he stressed that EU has not shown any extreme reflexes especially to other events, such as the period that Greece was asking for sanctions against Turkey, for the Cyprus issue and for the violation of Greece's sovereign rights. (2).

KINAL was represented to the parliament by MP Mr. Katrinis, leader of parliamentary group, since the leader of the party Mr. Androulakis is not a national MP and cannot participate to the process. Mr. Katrinis expressed the party's solidarity to the Ukrainian citizens and condemned Russia's invasion. However, he pointed out that the pre-invasion meeting between Dendias with Lavrov was a fiasco. He also criticized the government's response to the provocative accusations of Turkey towards Greece to the UN. However, it should be mentioned that KINAL is the only opposition

party that is not against the decision of the government to sent military aid to Ukraine (3).

The leader of the party KKE Mr. D. Koutsoumpas condemned the Russian invasion of Ukraine and expressed its solidarity to the people of Ukraine as well. He argued that people are the victims of the competition and interventions of spheres of influence with the US, NATO and the EU on the one hand and Russia on the other. Thus, other players on behalf of the US, NATO and EU methodically encirclement Russia economically, politically and militarily for years. He added that the Greek governments, throughout the years, supported NATO's decisions and push Greece into this dangerous competition. Moreover, Mr. Koutsoumpas stated that the military forces of US and NATO acquire access to Eastern Europe through the Alexandroupolis harbour and Stefanovikeio, bases built by SYRIZA, and are expanded by the current government. He also criticized the government for sending military equipment to Ukraine and argued the government should stop immediately the involvement of Greece, because the country could become a possible target of retaliation. However, the leader of KKE did not only critised the government but he accused SYRIZA as well of hypocritic narrative, when blaming unilaterally Russia, washing out the role of the US and NATO and agreeing to the participation of our country to the Euro-Atlantic planning (4).

In his turn the leader of the party of National Solution Mr. K. Velopoulos gave a speech, later highly criticized by PM Mitrostakis. He stated "Yes, Putin made Russia. It is a truth. Authoritarian, extreme? Yes. But he is a leader for his country. We admired what he did, we do not admire, and we condemn what he does". The PM in response declared that it is sad that the Greek parliament has a party leader expressing its admiration for the political greatness of President Putin. Velopoulos also criticized the government for sending military aid to Ukraine, since "Greece needs even its last bullet". He continued that both Russia and Ukraine are pro-Turkey, therefore Greece should not take a position (5).

Lastly, Mr. Varoufakis, the leader of the MeRA25 party, argued that the only solution is the withdrawal of Russian forces and the neutrality of

Ukraine, in detail a Washington-Moscow agreement based on a neutral but independent Ukraine. He continued by stating that Greece should raise the level of dialogue in Europe, showing that we can support the Ukrainian people without turning a blind eye to the Nazis of the Azov regiment. Moreover, according to Varoufakis, the US goal has been achieved. The EU is not only geopolitically non-existent, but it also blindly follows the US strategies even against its own interests. He also mentioned that the last events are a great diplomatic gift to Turkish President Erdogan. The leader of MeRA25 called on SYRIZA and KKE to join in an anti-war action and stop the government from exposing the country. He further accused the government of taking advantage of the war and the international turmoil so as not to support the small and medium-sized businesses, thus giving the opportunity to the cartels to economically thrive (6).

### **Latest events in Greek-Russia relations**

Following the high-level parliamentary meeting, on the 6<sup>th</sup> of March, the official representative of the Russian Foreign Minister M. Zakharova at a Facebook post uploaded on the page of the Russian Embassy in Greece, stated that Europe, including Greece, has fully joined the advocates of the Kiev regime, while the Russophobic hysteria cultivated by the authorities has reached a boiling point. On this basis, profoundly wrong decisions are made, including the shipment of weapons to Ukraine, since these weapons will be turned against civilians, including Greeks, who are used as human shields by Ukrainian nationalist battalions. She added that Athens actively supports the EU sanctions regime, uses the “energy blackmail” by proclaiming the rapid independence from Russian gas, closes the Greek airspace for the Russian airlines and suspends all cooperation in the field of culture. All these decisions of the Greek leadership aim to eliminate the common historical ties and cooperation of Greece and Russia (7).

The representative of the Greek MFA Mr. Papaioannou replied by stating that Greek foreign policy is based on the respect of international law and co-decides according to the principles associated to its membership at EU



and NATO. He also argued that the recent statements of the representative of the Russian Foreign Ministry, as well as the posts of the Russian embassy in Athens are unacceptable and not in line with the diplomatic practices, as well as with the historical ties that unite the peoples of Greece and Russia (8).

## Conclusion

Criticism of the opposition parties on the recent decisions of the government concerning the Russian invasion of Ukraine is robust. However, Greece is in the onset of a vast humanitarian and economic crisis which needs effective measures to be taken. Thus, political consensus requires to be reached urgently for dealing with the current and future crisis.

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# **Landslide Victory for the Governing Party in the Hungarian Parliamentary Elections (April)**

**Csaba Moldicz**

Last week, Hungary held its parliamentary elections. It was the ninth election after the political and economic transition of the early 1990s. Since then, many political parties have been represented in the Hungarian parliament, only a few have always been there. The Fidesz-KDNP and the MSZP are the parties that have always been able to form a parliamentary group. MSZP has been involved in the government three times, while Fidesz-KDNP has been able to provide the largest parliamentary group and form a government for the fifth time now. The big difference between the two parties is that the MSZP has shrunk to a small party, while the Fidesz-KDNP is still the most important political party in Hungary.

## **Introduction**

The Hungarian election took place on April 3, 2022. It was preceded by global shocks, such as Covid-19 in 2022-2021 and the war in Ukraine. The war overshadowed all other issues that would have been relevant to the election, even the government's performance in dealing with the pandemic and the economic shock that followed. For this reason, the outcome of the campaign was unpredictable, even though it was clear from the numbers that the most likely winner would be the ruling party. Voter reactions were more difficult to discern, however, because the major political blocs treated the war and the possible ways of responding to the challenge posed by the war quite differently. The outcome of the election was a landslide victory for the ruling party, which won a two-thirds victory. This briefing first looks at the election results and then briefly considers the reactions to the election results.

## **Hungarian elections in figures**

99.84 percent of the votes have been counted so far (04.08.2022), but the data arriving later will not significantly change the final result. The Fidesz-KDNP received 2,902 thousand votes, while the opposition bloc received 1,818 thousand votes last Sunday. The Our Homeland party also qualified for parliament with 320 thousand votes, which means 6.00 percent of the vote. The share of Fidesz-KDNP was 54.01 percent, while the opposition bloc received 34.35 percent of the vote.

In Hungary's parliamentary system, voters cast two votes, one for the parties' national lists and one for regional candidates. 106 seats can be won through the list of regional candidates, and the rest through votes for the national lists. The Fidesz-KDNP won 88 of the 106 seats, with the rest going to the opposition bloc. It should be noted that 16 of the 18 seats by the opposition bloc were achieved in Budapest; only two seats were won by the opposition outside the capital. Based on the national lists, Fidesz-KDNP had 48 seats, the opposition bloc had 37 seats and the Our Homeland party had 7 seats.

In total, there are 199 seats in the Hungarian Parliament, of which Fidesz-KDNP won 136 seats, the opposition bloc 55 seats, and "Our Homeland" 7 seats. (1 seat is reserved for ethnic minorities if they reach a certain number of votes, this time the threshold was 21,462 votes, the representative of ethnic Germans received 24,022 votes).

### **International reactions to the results**

Although Hungary is a small or medium-sized country, the elections and their results were picked up by the international media. There are two reasons for this: The final result was surprising even to them, who had predicted the ruling party's victory, and the Hungarian government has earned some opponents because the “thinking out of the box” strategy of the Fidesz-KDNP goes against the politically correct mainstream of Western countries. And the Hungarian response to the war in Ukraine was criticized by the Ukrainian president, so the Hungarian election also became part of the international news stream. Special attention was paid to

congratulations from the Russian president, but congratulations also came from China, India and Central Asian countries, while the liberal, left-leaning media wrote about the alleged threat to democracy posed by the fourth consecutive victory of the Fidesz-KDNP:

According to the BBC, Mr. Orbán's victory will be a headache for the European Union, while Germany's ARD pointed out that the main reason for the overwhelming Fidesz-KDNP victory was that voters were simply satisfied with the government's performance and the state of the economy and society. Germany's Der Spiegel claimed that the biggest threat to the new government now was not the opposition but inflation. The European version of the influential Politico foresees political battles between the European Union and the new Hungarian government. France's Le Figaro points out that the ruling party's victory was much clearer than expected before April 3. The magazine adds that voter turnout was extremely high, with 68.7 percent of eligible voters participating in last weekend's election. Bloomberg's coverage underscored that the war in Ukraine has radically changed the issues in Hungary's election campaign. According to the Wall Street Journal, the outcome of the election will intensify the debate in Europe over how much voters in European countries should spend on the war.

### **Consequences for the opposition camp**

The biggest surprise was the good performance of the party 'Our Homeland', which was founded only a few years ago, when important politicians of 'Jobbik' left the party because they did not agree with the new political line of the party, which moved the originally right-wing party more to the center of the political spectrum. 'Our Homeland' was able to attract 'Jobbik' voters, so 'Jobbik' became one of the biggest losers of this election. At the same time, we should keep in mind that the qualification of "Our Homeland" creates a new situation in the political landscape, as Fidesz-KDNP will be back in the center of the political spectrum, i.e. there is a political formation

to the left of Fidesz: the parties of the opposition camp, and there is another one to the right of Fidesz-KDNP: "Our Homeland".

Several analysts also stress that the election was much more about the right prime ministerial candidate than about political programs and promises of the parties. Another point to highlight is that, unlike in the 2019 regional elections, the ruling party did well in the regional electoral lists.

If we look at the opposition parties, we can see that with the new elections, new tensions must have arisen within the bloc, as the balance of power has been redefined. The DK almost doubled the number of parliamentary seats, in 2018 they won 9 seats, now they have 16 seats. The "Momentum" - based on the preliminary results - gained 11 mandates, while they had none between 2018 and 2022. We have already mentioned Jobbik's poor performance, we can add that LMP can only form a political faction because DK is ready to help them with one seat. (Political factions can be formed if the respective party has at least 5 deputies representatives in parliament.

In 2010, when the Fidesz-KDNP won the first time with a two-thirds majority, the opposition parties received 45 percent of the vote, this time only 35 percent. If we compare the results with the 2018 elections, we see that three out of ten opposition voters in 2018 turned away from the left-wing parties in 2022.

## **Summary**

The largest two-thirds majority ever recorded in the modern history of Hungarian parliamentary elections gives the re-elected Fidesz-KDNP very strong power. Of course, the ruling party will need this newly confirmed trust as external conditions in world economy and politics have redefined the economic policy space since the outbreak of war in Ukraine. The need to reshape the public budget, control inflation, utility prices, and invest in the economy will force the new government to redefine its goals for the near future. We cannot see clear at the moment but the Hungarian Prime Minister stressed on his first international press conference that they do not

intend the taxes levied upon families (persons, workers) but they do not exclude special taxes on certain well defined groups of companies. In the meantime, it is very likely that the opposition camp will have to redefine itself as the voters said a clear to the 'umbrella organization' they created to win the elections. We cannot be sure whether the parties of the opposition camp will continue this cooperation or not. The Our Homeland party will certainly be a crack in this system, as all the parties represented between 2018 and 2022 joined the camp; the new party will not do so, as its absence from the camp won it the support of voters.

# **Preparations for the Parliamentary Elections in Latvia: How the War in Ukraine Affects Party Ratings (April)**

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## **Summary**

The 14th elections to the Parliament (Saeima) of the Republic of Latvia will take place on October 1, 2022, in which 100 members of parliament will be elected for the next four years. According to the latest polls, it is possible that the next parliamentary term will be composed of deputies from 8 political parties. Due to recent domestic and geopolitical developments, party support is fluctuating rapidly, and previously strong parties are on the verge of collapse. On the other hand, the attitude of the population towards the elections is deteriorating - the number of voters who do not plan to participate in the elections is increasing from election to election.

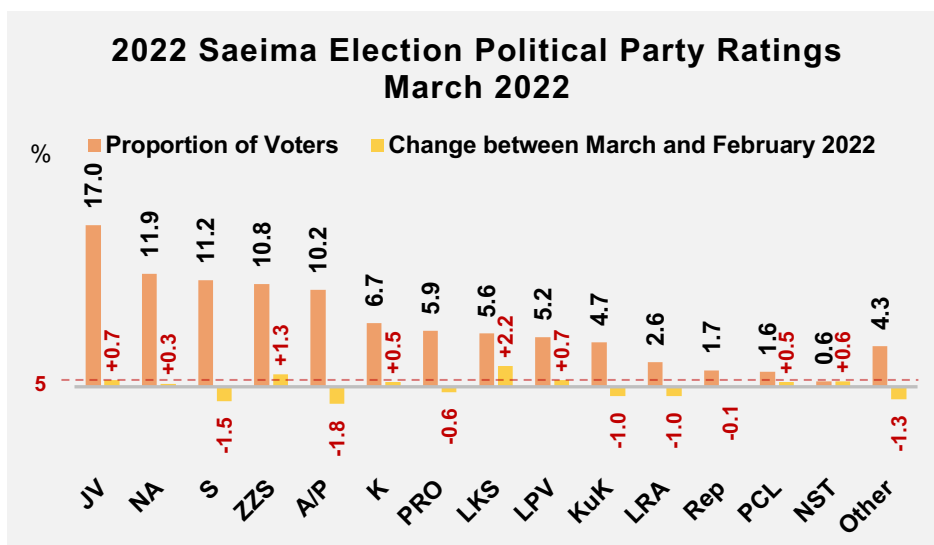
## **Introduction**

In April of this year, there is less than half a year left until the 14th parliamentary (Saeima) elections, which will take place on October 1 this year. Latvian citizens from the age of 18 will have the right to participate in elections. On the other hand, the number of voters who do not plan to participate in the elections is increasing from election to election, according to a voter survey conducted by the Central Election Commission. This month's domestic policy briefing will set out current party ratings and a recent public opinion poll showing gloomy statistics of the possible turnout.

## **I Current Political Party Ratings**



In March of this year - when Russia had already started a war in Ukraine - the “Latvian Russian Union” experienced the largest increase in support in Latvia, according to the party ratings created by the company "FACTUM".



**Figure 1. March 2022 Political Party Ratings for the 2022 Election of the Parliament (Saeima) of the Republic of Latvia and Ranking Position Changes<sup>1</sup>**

Source: created by the author using FACTUM data

The survey was conducted from March 29 to 31, 2022 and Latvian citizens over the age of 18 were interviewed. Of the 498 respondents, 51.9% do not plan to participate in the upcoming Saeima elections. According to the results, if the Saeima elections took place in March this year, 5.6% of voters

<sup>1</sup> **Abbreviations:** **JV** – “New Unity” (“*Jauna Vienotība*”); **NA** – “National Alliance” (“*Nacionālā Apvienība*”); **S** – “Harmony” (“*Saskaņa*”); **ZZS** – “Union of Greens and Farmers” (“*Zaļo un Zemnieku Savienība*”); **A/P** – “Development/For!” (“*Attīstībai/Par!*”); **K** – “Conservatives” (“*Konservatīvie*”); **PRO** – “Progressives” (“*Progresīvie*”); **LKS** – “Latvian Russian Union” (“*Latvijas Krievu Savienība*”); **LPV** – “Latvia First” (“*Latvija pirmajā vietā*”); **KuK** – “For Each and Every One” (“*Katram un Katrai*”); **LRA** – “Latvian Regional Alliance” (“*Latvijas Reģionu Apvienība*”); **Rep** – “Republicans” (“*Republikāņi*”); **PCL** – “For a Humane Latvia” (“*Par Cilvēcīgu Latviju*”); **NST** – “NS Justice” (“*NS Taisnīgums*”)

would support the “Latvian Russian Union”. Over the past month, support for the party has increased by 2.2 percentage points, allowing the party to rank eighth among 14 parties with support above the 0.5% mark. The second largest increase in support - by 1.3 percentage points - was in March for the “Union of Greens and Farmers”, which would have been voted by 10.8% of respondents, thus ranking this political force in the fourth place in the party rankings.

If the Saeima elections had taken place in March, then in total 17% of respondents would support the "New Unity", 11.9% - the “National Alliance”, but in the third place in terms of voter support would have been "Harmony", which would be supported by 11.2% of respondents. Support for this party has decreased by 1.5 percentage points on a monthly basis. In terms of voter support, “Development/For!” also fell by 1.8 percentage points in March, thus entering the fifth place in the party rating table. This political force would have been supported by 10.2% of respondents in March.

The party "Conservatives" (previously the “New Conservative Party”) experienced a slight increase in support - 0.5 percentage points, in the sixth position, as it would have been voted for by 6.7% of respondents, in seventh place after the support of voters in March would be the "Progressives", for which 5.9% would vote, this party is followed by the already mentioned “Latvian Russian Union”, leaving the party "Latvia's First" in the ninth place - 5.2% of voters. Support for this party increased by 0.7 percentage points in March.

The party "For Each and Every One", if the Saeima elections had taken place in March, would have gained 4.7% of voters' support, and for this organization has decreased by one percentage point over the month. Support for the “Latvian Regional Alliance” has also decreased by one percentage point - it would have gained 2.6% of voters' support in March.

"Harmony" has a noticeable decline in ratings, but "Latvian Russian Union" - the biggest increase of all parties. Various experts agree that this

is due to the war in Ukraine and the views of both “Harmony” leaders - Nils Usakovs and Janis Urbanovics - condemning the Russian aggression in the early days of the war. According to experts, apparently, part of the voters of "Harmony" are radical and pro-Russian enough to support Putin. Meanwhile, sociologist Arnis Kaktins explained: “What we know from other polls is that most of the Russian-speaking supporters of Latvia, including the supporters of “Harmony” had positive attitudes towards Russia until the events in Ukraine. We know that the Latvian-speaking public saw things very differently. But it seemed to the Russian-speakers that those Latvians were unreasonably afraid and exaggerating.”

The biggest drop is for the scandalous party association “Development/For!”. In response to the decision of the Minister of Environmental Protection and Regional Development Arturs Toms Pless (“Development/For!”) to suspend the Riga Development Plan, which is related to a possible gambling lobby, the Mayor of Riga Martins Stakis announced his resignation from the party association “Development/For!”. The “Progressives”, which is part of the ruling coalition of the Riga City Council, as well as the Union of Greens and Farmers, in response to the suspension of the Riga Development Plan, called on the Prime Minister to demand the resignation of Minister Pless, which was rejected by the Saeima on April 7, 2022. Currently, the “For!” Movement is collecting signatures of members to decide whether to withdraw from the elections together with the "Development / For!".

## **II Possibility of Low Turnout**

In 2018, before the 13th Saeima elections, according to the data by the Central Election Commission (CEC), 20% of respondents, but this year, in a poll ordered by the CEC, 36% have indicated that they will not participate in the 14th Saeima elections planned for this year or are more likely not to participate. The study explained the reasons that encourage or hinder voters to participate in the Saeima elections. As reason why they do not plan to

participate in the 14th Saeima elections, 25% of voters indicate that they have no faith in politicians, 20% do not know what to vote for, but 9% admitted that they are not interested in politics at all and are indifferent to these issues. About 3.4% of voters said their vote would have no effect, but 5% questioned the fairness of the election. By comparison, in 2018, 21% said they did not believe in anything, but 8% of those who did not plan to vote said they had nothing to vote for. According to the survey data, 66% of voters plan to participate in the upcoming Saeima elections this year, which is less than in 2018, when 77% of respondents stated that they plan to participate in the 13th Saeima elections.

## **Conclusions**

If the voters vote as they indicated in the recent polls, then the Saeima would probably have 8 parties in it: “New Unity”, “Union of Greens and Farmers”, “National Alliance”, “Harmony”, “Development/For!”, “Progressives”, “Latvian Russian Union” and “Conservatives”. The results of this month's rating leader "New Unity" have been stable on an annual basis. However, with the start of the Russian war in Ukraine, its rating has risen significantly. According to various experts, this is mostly due to Foreign Minister Edgars Rinkevics coordinated response to the war in Ukraine. The "Union of Greens and Farmers" has stable ratings. The rating of the “National Alliance” has not fluctuated sharply, and the increase in support for potential voters since the beginning of the war has been very small. The party association "Development/For!" is having the hardest time of all the parties. The future of the controversial association will be judged in the near future, following the changes in the mutual relations of the “Movement "For!"” and "Latvia's Development". The rating of the “Latvian Russian Union” has been low throughout the last year. However, there has been a slight increase since the start of the Russia-Ukraine war. A part of the "Harmony" voters could go to the "Latvian Russian Union" in the long run. The rating of the "Conservatives" has remained stable, also exceeding the 5% barrier by 0.3 percentage points in March. Judging by

the population survey, there is a possibility that the turnout in these elections may be lower than in the 2018 elections, but the rapidly changing geopolitical situation and scandals in the political scene could potentially change the population's position regarding this question in the six following months.

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# **The Party-Political Landscape in the Context of the War in Ukraine (March)**

**Gjorgjioska M. Adela**

## **Summary**

The escalation of the military conflict in Ukraine shed a new light on the Macedonian party-political landscape. As political parties expressed their positions in various statements and symbolic actions, this allowed for a crystallization of their assessment about the foreign policy that the country should pursue in the context of the shifting geopolitical realities. Since the views of the public rarely matched the positions espoused by their political parties, this opened the possibility for shifts in political preferences amongst the electorate as a result of the Russia-Ukraine conflict. On a socio-political level, the Ukrainian conflict seemed to open another line of inter-ethnic divergence, as large sections of the ethnic-Macedonian population demonstrated sympathies for a neutral or pro-Russian position, while the ethnic-Albanian population by and large seemed more inclined to support the official NATO line.

Since the early stages of the military conflict in Ukraine, the mainstream parties from the political establishment began to align with the official NATO and EU positions. The leader of the SDSM and current Prime Minister Kovachevski made his position clear early on. “I condemn the act of open military aggression by Russia against Ukraine” he said on the 24th of February. Moreover, he confirmed that “North Macedonia is in line with the EU and NATO foreign and security policies regarding the sanctions

against the Russian Federation”.<sup>1</sup> He reiterated this view in an interview a couple of days later: "North Macedonia is a member of NATO and we make all decisions in accordance with the decisions of the alliance in a process in which we participate as a member state. We are on the side of Ukraine's territorial integrity and sovereignty and in the name of protecting those international values we are fully aligned with the economic sanctions imposed by the EU on Russia in order to prevent further escalation of this war."<sup>2</sup>

The stance adopted by VMRO-DPMNE, the second largest political party in the country, was not dissimilar to the line adopted by the PM. They expressed their full support for NATO's position in the conflict between Ukraine and Russia: “VMRO-DPMNE, in accordance with its ideological, programmatic and strategic assurances and actions, fully supports the views of the parties of the European People's Party (EPP) in connection with the latest escalation of the conflict between Ukraine and the Russian Federation,” the statement read. Moreover, it added: "Once again, we reiterate that for VMRO-DPMNE, respect for the norms of international law, whose main part is the territorial sovereignty, integrity and independence of Ukraine, are fundamentally important. VMRO-DPMNE, as in the past and now, but also in the future, fully supports NATO's positions regarding the challenges facing the world today."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> “Kovachevski in conversation with Shmyhal: You have our support for the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Ukraine”, published on 23.02.2022, available at <https://vlada.mk/node/27881> accessed on 02.03.2022

<sup>2</sup> “Prime Minister Kovacevski: The war in Ukraine is a huge threat to European and world security and should end immediately”, published on 04.03.2022, available at <https://vlada.mk/node/27978> accessed on 10.03.2022

<sup>3</sup> VMRO-DPMNE: We fully support NATO's position on the conflict between Ukraine and Russia, published on 24.02.2022, available at

<https://360stepeni.mk/vmro-dpmne-vo-tselost-go-poddrzhuvame-stavot-na-nato-za-konfliktot-megu-ukraina-i-rusija/> accessed on 03.03.2022



Expectedly, all the parties from the ethnic-Albanian political bloc immediately fell behind the official NATO line. Since the NATO aggression against Yugoslavia in 1999, NATO has been portrayed as the “UN in a military uniform”, and is perceived as aligned with the ethnic-Albanian interests. The positions taken by the ethnic-Albanian political parties in response to the war in Ukraine were consistent with this view. “President Putin and Russia should feel responsible for invading a nation, violating the will of a nation, and this is a disgrace”, leader of DUI Ali Ahmeti said.<sup>1</sup> The leader of the second largest ethnic-Albanian party in the country “Alliance for Albanians” Zijadin Sela even asked for the Macedonian government to withdraw from the regional Open Balkans initiative: "With Serbia, which so openly cooperates politically and economically with the Russian aggressor, the Open Balkans risks becoming Putin's Trojan horse in the Western Balkans," Sela reacted on the 28th of February.<sup>2</sup>

The only political party which diverged from the NATO line was “Levica” (The Left). They criticized the Government’s subservience to NATO and the EU and opposed the sanctions on economic and anti-imperialist

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<sup>1</sup> Ahmeti statement on the war in Ukraine, published on 12.03.2022, available at <https://mk.tv21.tv/ahmeti-za-vojnata-vo-ukraina-kolku-pobrzo-putin-se-povleche-tolku-podobro-za-rusija/> accessed on 14.03.2022

<sup>2</sup> “N. Macedonia - A subject or an object of the large crisis”, published on 01.03.2022, available at <https://www.dw.com/mk/%D1%81-%D0%BC%D0%B0%D0%BA%D0%B5%D0%B4%D0%BE%D0%BD%D0%B8%D1%98%D0%B0-%D1%81%D1%83%D0%B1%D1%98%D0%B5%D0%BA%D1%82-%D0%B8%D0%BB%D0%B8-%D0%BE%D0%B1%D1%98%D0%B5%D0%BA%D1%82-%D0%B2%D0%BE-%D0%B3%D0%BE%D0%BB%D0%B5%D0%BC%D0%B0%D1%82%D0%B0-%D0%BA%D1%80%D0%B8%D0%B7%D0%B0/a-60956518>, accessed on 20.03.2022

grounds.<sup>1</sup> On the 16th of March, the Left's two MPs in the 120-seat parliament, party leader Dimitar Apasiev and Borislav Krmov, met the Russian ambassador, Sergey Bazdnikin.<sup>2</sup> They distanced themselves from what was described in their press release as “the latest controversial actions of the Macedonian diplomacy”. Moreover, they stated that “these uncivilized anti-russian steps in no way express the will of the majority of Macedonian citizens”.<sup>3</sup> In the statement, the sanctions that the Republic of Macedonia imposed on the Russian Federation were described as unnecessary and “taken under pressure from the EU and NATO”.<sup>4</sup> The meeting was immediately condemned by NGO activists and mainstream political parties. “The Left is increasingly displaying that it is not part of the democratic processes in the country,” the spokesperson of the ruling Social Democrats, Bogdanka Kuzevska, said in reaction to the meeting. The SDSM also put public pressure on the main opposition party VMRO DPMNE, to distance itself from the party, which the party has not yet done.<sup>5</sup> The former head of the country's Helsinki Committee for Human Rights, Mirjana Najcevska, said that the two Left MPs should face scrutiny

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<sup>1</sup> Sanctions against Russia would only harm the Macedonian economy, published on 25.02.2022 available at <https://levica.mk/2022/02/25/sanktsii-za-rusija-edinstveno-bi-nashtetile-na-makedonskata-ekonomija/> accessed on 10.03.2022

<sup>2</sup> “The MPs of the Left met with the Russian Ambassador Bezdnicin in the Parliament of the Republic of Macedonia”, available at <https://antropol.mk/2022/03/16/pratenicite-na-levica-ostvarija-sredba-so-rus-ambasador/>, published on 16.03.2022, accessed on 17.03.2022

<sup>3</sup> Ibid

<sup>4</sup> Ibid

<sup>5</sup> North Macedonia's Left Condemned for Aligning with Russia on Ukraine, available at <https://balkaninsight.com/2022/03/18/north-macedonias-left-condemned-for-aligning-with-russia-on-ukraine/> published on 18.03.2022, accessed on 03.04.2022

under the law, which treats the “approval or justification of a genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes” as a crime.<sup>1</sup>

### **The public perceptions on the conflict**

From the early stages of the conflict, it seemed that large sections of the ethnic-Macedonian population demonstrated sympathies for a neutral or a pro-Russian position. This stance is consistent with the findings of a public opinion poll by the International Republic Institute published on the 7th of March 2022, which revealed a growing discrepancy between the positions of the political establishment and the people. The poll found that in terms of foreign policy, 64 percent of Macedonian citizens agree that strong relations with China serve their interests, and 60 per cent think the same for Russia, which is an increase of 11 per cent for China and six per cent for Russia since last year. Another research conducted by the Prespa Institute in January 2022 revealed similar findings. It found that in 2022 only 7,1% and 7,8% respectively recognize NATO and the European Union as a friend or supporter of the state. According to the data, despite the really small presence, Russia has a positive image among the Macedonian citizens. Additionally, 39% of the citizens identified Serbia as a friend in 2022, compared to 14% who held this opinion in 2020. “Russia (with 4.3%) is the third biggest friend of Macedonia for the voters of VMRO-DPMNE, just behind Serbia and the United States. Moreover, Russia is viewed as the second biggest friend of Macedonia (with 6.3%) for the voters of the Left, just behind Serbia. 1.1% of SDSM voters identify Russia as a friend of N. Macedonia. Russia does not appear as a friendly country amongst the voters of any of the Albanian parties in the country,” the Director of the Prespa Institute explained.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid

<sup>2</sup> “Is there a pro-Russian sentiment in Macedonia”, published on 02.03.2022, available at <https://www.dw.com/mk/%D0%B8%D0%BC%D0%B0-%D0%BB%D0%B8-%>

In line with such poll findings, the positions expressed by ethnic-Macedonians on social media revealed a tendency to either support a neutral position in the war in Ukraine or to show an understanding and justification for Russia's actions. During the first week of the Russian attack on Ukraine, the most shared content by local users on social media was a news item published on Facebook by a national TV station which contained a statement of North Korea's Kim Jong-un, that "the US is to blame for the Ukraine crisis". On the 12th of March, the marginal political party "Rodina Macedonia" organized a protest in support of Russia, which was attended by around one hundred people. In their speeches, the individuals present stated that they, as participants in the rally, were not against the Ukrainian people and that they wanted reconciliation between Russia and Ukraine. Regarding the conflict in Ukraine, some participants pointed out that "this is not an occupation of the country, but an operation for the denazification and demilitarization of the Ukrainian state".<sup>1</sup> The participants carried banners saying: "Macedonians are your [Russia's] brothers" and other slogans which suggested that the protests in Ukraine that toppled the old pro-Russian leadership had been staged by the CIA. President Pendarovski acknowledged that the positions taken by ethnic-Macedonians diverged from those of the mainstream political parties: "It is indisputable that the Macedonian people have sympathy for Russia because of their religion, language and Slavic ethnicity. What worries me is that in

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[D0%BF%D1%80%D0%BE%D1%80%D1%83%D1%81%D0%BA%D0%BE-%D1%80%D0%B0%D1%81%D0%BF%D0%BE%D0%BB%D0%BE%D0%B6%D0%B5%D0%BD%D0%B8%D0%B5-%D0%BC%D0%B5%D1%93%D1%83-%D0%BC%D0%B0%D0%BA%D0%B5%D0%B4%D0%BE%D0%BD%D1%81%D0%BA%D0%B8%D1%82%D0%B5-%D0%B3%D1%80%D0%B0%D1%93%D0%B0%D0%BD%D0%B8/a-60978767](https://mk.voanews.com/a/sobir-vo-skopje-za-poddrska-na-rusija/6482267.html) accessed on 01.04.2022

<sup>1</sup> Hundreds of participants in the rally in support of Russia in Skopje, published on 12.03.2022, available at

<https://mk.voanews.com/a/sobir-vo-skopje-za-poddrska-na-rusija/6482267.html> accessed on 14.04.2022

the political sense, ethnic Macedonians are sympathetic to Russia's political views. It is especially worrying that over 40 percent of the public thinks that the Eurasian Union is an alternative to the EU, and some of the parties are predominantly in favor of this option, which could create a problem with future processes”, Pendarovski stated in an interview.<sup>1</sup>

The large majority of political parties chose to follow the official NATO position with regards to the war in Ukraine. The only political party which diverged from this position, Levica (The Left), was immediately condemned and calls for their political repression were expressed by sections of civil society and the mainstream political parties. Public officials also expressed their dissatisfaction with the opinions held by large sections of the ethnic-Macedonian public. Since the views of the public rarely matched the positions espoused by their political parties, this opened the possibility for shifts in political preferences amongst the electorate as a result of the Russia-Ukraine conflict.

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<sup>1</sup> “Pendarovski worried that Macedonians support Russia”, published on 25.02.2022, available at <https://nezavisen.mk/pendarovski-zagrizen-shto-makedoncite-se-vrtat-kon-rusija/> accessed on 26.02.2022

# **Poland will Significantly Increase Military Spending - to 3 Percent of GDP Starting in 2023 (March)**

**Konrad Rajca**

## **Summary**

Russia's aggression against Ukraine has toned down political dissent in Poland. Most significant political forces recognize the need to increase the country's security and support Ukraine and Ukrainians in the conflict with Russia. The situation in Ukraine has accelerated work on the government-approved bill "On Defense of the Homeland," a draft of which was presented as early as October in the face of a migration "hybrid war" on the Polish-Belarusian border inspired by Belarus. It is to lead to doubling the size of the Polish army, its modernization and providing additional funding. Spending on the army is to be increased to 3 percent of GDP next year, which would put Poland in the lead of EU countries in this respect. In connection with the situation in Ukraine, President Andrzej Duda convened the National Security Council with the participation of opposition groups and delivered a message to the nation.

## **Introduction**

On March 3rd, the Polish Sejm, the lower house of parliament, held a special session devoted to the situation in Ukraine. During the session, in response to the threats posed by the situation in Ukraine, work began on the "On Homeland Defense" bill adopted by the government. Deputy Prime Minister for Security Affairs and President of the ruling Law and Justice party (PiS), Jaroslaw Kaczynski, together with Minister of National Defense Mariusz Blaszczak, presented the assumptions and objectives of the law, which is to be proceeded at an accelerated pace, is to enter into force 30 days after publication in the Journal of Laws.

## **More military spending and a larger army**

The new law simplifies regulations that have been in place in the Polish military for 50 years and are scattered across 14 laws. The new document repeals them and organizes in one place. The project assumes an increase in defense spending to 3 percent of GDP already next year (according to previous plans, it was to be 2.5 percent of GDP by 2026). Today, the Polish army has over 111 thousand professional soldiers and 32 thousand soldiers of the Territorial Defense Forces. After the changes in a few years, it is expected to count 250 thousand professional soldiers and 50 thousand of the Territorial Defense Forces.

According to SIPRI, Poland spent \$13 billion, or 2.2 percent of GDP, on the military in 2020. This spending was 8.7 percent higher than in 2019 and 60 percent higher than in 2011. According to the "National Security Strategy 2020" Poland has committed to increase the military budget to 2.5 percent of GDP in 2024. According SIPRI, Polish military spending in 2020 accounted for 39 percent of the military budget in Central Europe.

## **New military funding, Cyberspace Defense Forces**

The authors of the bill also propose that part of the expenditures on the military be financed outside the budget of the Ministry of Defense. As a source they indicate the Armed Forces Support Fund, which is to be established in the National Economy Bank. The bill focuses on creating incentives for active-duty soldiers and military candidates.

The Armed Forces Support Fund is to be funded, among other things, from revenues from making training grounds available to foreign troops, revenues from the Military Property Agency, sale of property, damages, and contractual penalties. Another source of funding is to be revenue from the sale of bonds and treasury securities.

The bill emphasizes simplifying Army recruitment and creating incentives for service candidates. It also creates voluntary, basic military service. It will last 12 months, during which a soldier will complete 28 days of basic training and 11 months of specialized training. After the voluntary service soldiers will be able to apply for the professional army.

The government project strengthens the position of the Territorial Defense Forces (WOT). There will be more of them, and they will be subordinated not to the army command, but to the minister of national defense. WOT will also receive new powers to coordinate crisis management.

There will also be a reserve military service, which will be divided into active and passive. Passive service will include people who are qualified for the reserve without taking the oath and those who took the oath but are not interested in serving in the army. Active military service, on the other hand, includes those who have completed military training and have taken the oath but are willing to serve in the military. The United States has introduced a similar solution.

The bill also includes, among other things, an increase in emoluments, allowances, and scholarships for students at civilian universities who will want to associate their future with the military.

One of the most important regulations concerning Polish cybersecurity is the one containing provisions on the Cyber Defense Forces (WOC). The bill will sanction the WOC at the statutory level. The document identifies the Cyberspace Defense Forces as a specialized component of the Armed Forces and that they are "competent to carry out the full spectrum of activities in cyberspace, in particular regarding proactive protection and defense of elements and resources of cyberspace crucial from the point of view of the Armed Forces".

**The leader of the ruling camp: we have a state of emergency**



The law was prepared based on the experience of the last few years, which clearly showed that Russia can use force to pursue its interests, to implement plans to enclose the empire. But we did not think that the first, so drastic steps in this area would be taken so quickly," the deputy prime minister and chairman of the ruling Law and Justice (PiS) party Jarosław Kaczyński stressed during a discussion in parliament.

Kaczyński also said that the basic premise for passing the proposed law is "the feeling that we have on the border (...) a state that behaves in a way that we can already see today in its entirety. - Hence the need and main assumptions, from which we started creating this law - he added.

According to Kaczyński, restrictions on financing the armed forces should be suspended. - Because there is a state of emergency. But there is also a change in the situation. Poland is much stronger today than it was years ago. We have three times bigger GDP, and therefore much bigger economic possibilities. We must get out of this feeling of poverty and national micromania," said the Law and Justice president.

- The army is to deter. We want peace, we do not want war. However, for this peace to exist, the enemies we know must be convinced that an attack on Poland would not be profitable. We must have a very strong army," said Jarosław Kaczyński. He also pointed out that external help can only come when the attacked country starts to defend itself. - We count on such help, but first we have to count on ourselves," he added.

All opposition groups announced support for the bill and work on amendments that would help avoid legislative errors. During the debate, the opposition pointed to the long-term effects of passing the bill, which will produce results only in the long run. Thus, they pointed out the necessity of adopting necessary solutions to increase Polish security in the current situation. The comments also concerned the definition of adequate control and supervision over the financing of the army.

## **The President of Poland Andrzej Duda met with the opposition at the National Security Council**

The President Andrzej Duda in the framework of the National Security Council met with opposition groups, during which he appealed for unity of all political forces in the country in the face of threats related to the war in Ukraine. - The situation is dramatic. None of us can predict what it will lead to," he said at the beginning of the meeting.

Before the meeting, however, he stressed that Polish soldiers do not go to war. He asked everyone to pay special attention to disinformation. - Polish soldiers do not go to war. Please do not listen to such information. Of course, if it is necessary to defend our country, we will defend it. However, there is no indication that we will be attacked," stressed President Duda.

## **The message of President Duda to the nation**

The President Andrzej Duda gave a special address to the nation in connection with the situation in Ukraine. - Russian troops attacked the independent Ukraine. They unleashed a cruel war against our neighbor. Today, bombs are falling on Kiev, and the inhabitants together with the Ukrainian army are defending their city. The capital, like the whole of Ukraine, has become a symbol for the free world of the defense of our common values: freedom, sovereignty and democracy," said President Duda.

He noted that for a week "the whole of Ukraine has been heroically standing up to the invaders, paying the highest price in the process. - Residential houses, blocks of flats, schools and hospitals are under attack. The numerous attacks by Russian troops have the hallmarks of genocide. I believe that they will not go unpunished and their perpetrators will answer for them before international courts. As Poland, we have been actively helping our neighbors from day one. We have been striving in the

international arena for the strongest possible sanctions against the aggressors, and they have become a fact," Duda said.

- Today the Polish point of view has been accepted by most Western countries. This is a great change. We are an advocate for Ukraine in its efforts to join the European Union. As part of NATO, we are providing concrete assistance to Ukraine, which is defending itself. Poland has already taken in over half a million refugees fleeing the tragedy of war. I talk to President Zelenski almost daily about how else we can support our neighbors. He also asked me to convey to all Poles his heartfelt thanks for the great support, Ukraine receives from our country and society. True friends are made in poverty. I know that you do it out of the need of your heart, both by welcoming our neighbors under your roof, helping with transport, organizing collections, charity actions, as well as donating gifts, and transferring funds to help Ukraine - Duda mentioned.

About a million Ukrainian refugees have already arrived in Poland since the beginning of Russia's aggression against Ukraine. (08.03.22)

He noted that "as a nation - once again we show what Solidarity means. - The entire administration, both central and local government, faced a great challenge. The relevant services are put on high alert. I highly appreciate the actions taken in recent days. The Polish state passes a test. Today, Poland is a symbol of help for Ukraine. This is why we have become and will become a target of organized cynical Russian propaganda and disinformation. We must all be aware of this. Attempts have already been made to slander Poland in foreign media, to stir up hostile emotions towards the refugees we are receiving. We must expect many such provocations in the near future. I assure you that we, as a country, will react to them firmly, but I also ask you all to be exceptionally cautious and responsible. Let's not spread rumors and unverified information, let's not allow ourselves to be divided, let's not allow one group of people to be pitted against another. This is what those who committed this brutal aggression care about," stressed Duda.

According to the Polish President unity and responsibility are needed for all of us, but especially in politics. - Today we need cooperation. This is not the time for political quarrels. What matters is Poland and its security, what matters is help for those fighting for Ukraine's independence. This is what the Polish *raison d'état* requires. Long live free, independent and democratic Ukraine. Long live Poland - concluded Andrzej Duda.

## **Conclusion**

Russia's aggression against Ukraine has united the Polish political class. It has accelerated efforts to increase the size of the Polish army, to increase its funding, and to modernize the armed forces, as reflected in the law "On Defense of the Homeland." This is a response to the increased threat to Poland's security, led by Russia's aggressive military actions against Poland's neighbor - Ukraine.

## **New Controversies on Reforming Justice (March)**

**Oana Popovici**

### **Summary**

Although carefully looking on the situation in Ukraine, the political class has returned its attention to the judicial field in these last days. The abolition of the Section for the Investigation of Crimes in Justice, requested by European institutions in the last three years, was initiated and is about to be enacted. However, the parties in opposition are against the proposed draft law, accusing that the institution is, in fact, reinvented, and the competences of investigating judges and prosecutors involved in offenses are not restored to the previously institution with such responsibilities, which proved its efficiency. The President was asked not to promulgate the law before the publication of the Venice Commission's opinion, while a censure motion against the Minister of Justice could also be filled soon.

The project to abolish the Section for the Investigation of Crimes in Justice (also known as the Special Section or SICJ) was initiated after the request of the European Commission (EC), highlighted in the Cooperation and Verification Mechanism (CVM) reports and the GRECO reports in the last three years. In addition, the Venice Commission, an advisory body to the Council of Europe composed of independent experts in the field of constitutional law, recommended Romania to abolish SICJ. The Venice Commission welcomed the intention of the Romanian authorities to reform the judiciary and restore the competence of specialized prosecutor's offices such as the National Anticorruption Directorate (NDA) and the Directorate for Investigating Organized Crime and Terrorism (DIOCT), suggesting that a first urgent step in this broader reform is the abolition of the Special Section.

SICJ was launched in October 2018, having the exclusive competence to prosecute offenses committed by judges and prosecutors, including military judges and prosecutors and those who are members of the Superior Council of Magistracy (SCM). The work of the SICJ has been criticized by both the European Commission and the European institutions from the point of view of the Court of Justice of the European Union. One of the EC's arguments against this institution was the suspicion that the Special Section was established only for transferring sensitive cases from NDA to SICJ, which could be more subject to external intervention and political pressure than an institution dedicated to such actions over time, such as the National Anticorruption Directorate, precisely because the SICJ was empowered to investigate anyone once a magistrate was mentioned in the complaint.

Several unsuccessful attempts for the abolition of the Section were made since then, but only now political agreement was achieved for reaching this aim, at the fifth attempt. At the beginning of the year, the actual Minister of Justice initiated a draft normative act which stipulates that the SICJ will be abolished, and its powers will be taken over by the ordinary Prosecutor's Offices, the cases being investigated by specifically appointed prosecutors. However, the project has generated criticism in the public space, with some voices claiming that a second version of SICJ will thus be created, since the powers of the Special Section will in fact be transferred to a new structure, called by the minister "a system inspired by the model of the European Public Prosecutor's Office". The central nucleus will be at the Criminal Investigation and Forensic Section of the General Prosecutor's Office, where 12 prosecutors will have jurisdiction over cases involving alleged acts of corruption by magistrates. NDA, which is the only prosecutor's office specialized in corruption, is thus excluded from the scheme. In addition to the 12 prosecutors, 30 prosecutors from each court of appeals in the country will have powers over such acts. Motivating the exclusion of NDA from this scheme, the Minister of Justice, Cătălin Predoiu, said that another technical solution for the abolition of the SICJ is not politically possible at this moment, stating that the new project was

agreed by all parties in the coalition. The abolition of the Special Section was one of the important bottlenecks in the negotiations between the three parties in the governing coalition, given that each one held a different position so far. He also claims that it is not another structure to replace the SICJ, but a new system, citing the model of the European Public Prosecutor's Office. The Parliament adopted, at the end of February, the draft law of the Government on the abolition of the Special Section. If the procedure will continue without disruptions, the special section will be abolished at the latest in March, as provided by the governing program.

However, the Union Save Romania (USR) party filed a complaint with the Constitutional Court in Romania (CCR) regarding the draft envisaging the abolition of the SICJ, noting that the legislative proposal made by the Minister of Justice does not imply the abolition of the SICJ, but a reinvention of this institution. The party claims that the project violates the principle of equality before the law, in an attempt to avoid NDA, as there will be appointed prosecutors for investigating cases in which magistrates are involved. This jeopardizes the independence of magistrates, given that these appointed prosecutors could be selected in a non-transparent and even political way, through the General Prosecutor and the Superior Council of Magistracy. The party also invokes the efficiency of the NDA, which has obtained 117 final convictions of corrupt magistrates, with other lawsuits pending. Although SICJ was created in 2018, there is no prosecution for corruption yet. In addition, USR officials consider that the draft overthrowing the SICJ had been hastily adopted by the ruling coalition before receiving approval from the Venice Commission, and without meeting the 30-days public consultation deadline. The project also does not comply with previous opinions of the Venice Commission, which has repeatedly emphasized the importance of having specialized sections, such as NDA, and the MCV reports, which have always highlighted the importance of restoring NDA and **DIOCT** competencies. The party Alliance for the Union of Romanians (AUR) also sent a notification to the Constitutional Court on the normative act.

However, the Constitutional Court unanimously rejected the USR and AUR notifications regarding the law on the abolition of the Special Section and found that the contested articles in the law are constitutional in relation to the criticisms made. Now, in order to enter into force, it only remains that the law on SICJ abolition to be promulgated by the President Iohannis. USR accused the Constitutional Court of rushing to take a decision on the project of the Minister of Justice and asked the CCR judges to postpone the decision until after the publication of the Venice Commission opinion, **which is due to be published around mid-March. The promulgation of the law is proposed to be postponed for a short period, for ensuring its adoption while covering the recommendations of international experts.** **In the meantime,** USR continued the demarche for opposing to the promulgation of the law. Following the CCR decision, the USR former Minister of Justice asked President Klaus Iohannis not to promulgate the Law on the abolition of the SICJ and demanded the resignation of the Minister of Justice, Cătălin Predoiu, if the Venice Commission's opinion will be critical of the normative act. Moreover, USR sent an open letter to President Klaus Iohannis asking him to resubmit to Parliament the same law, motivating that it was passed in Parliament very quickly, without waiting for the opinion of the Venice Commission. At the same time, USR recalls that Romania's commitments, assumed through CVM, provide for consultations with the Venice Commission regarding the important changes concerning the field of justice. USR is considering the actual proposal as being controversial, however the previous minister of justice representing USR did not managed to deal with the situation in a favourable manner after eight months in office, despite the fact that the USR members invoked constantly the abolition of the Special Section.

USR claims that the only natural solution which is in accordance with Romania's constitutional obligations and with European institutions requests, remains the unconditional abolition of the Special Section and the restoration of the powers of specialized prosecutor's offices, such as NDA and DIICOT, as proposed by relevant European bodies. NDA also criticizes the government's bill, and considers that in this way, the fight against high-



and middle-level corruption would fragment, while its effectiveness would be reduced. NDA representatives also pointed out that the solution adopted by the project aims to replace a single structure, SICJ, with 16 different structures in the General Prosecutor's Office, thus dissipating both resources and powers of prosecution and allowing a perpetuation of non-specialization of prosecutors who will investigate corruption cases regarding magistrates.

The disagreements on this subject will continue, as USR decided to launch a censure motion against the Minister of Justice regarding the abolition of the SICJ. USR considers that the adoption of the actual legislative proposal is a frontal attack on the Romanian judiciary, because in this way only the abolition of the SICJ is mimicked. The actual tensions on the political arena will further depend on the opinion of the Venice Commission, which is expected in the following days.

# **Germany Hosted Vučić and Kurti Meeting (May)**

**Ivona Ladjevac**

## **Summary**

At the beginning of May, May 5<sup>th</sup>, German Chancellor, Olaf Sholz, hosted the meeting between Aleksandar Vučić, President of the Republic of Serbia, and Albin Kurti, Prime minister of the provisional Priština institutions. Miroslav Lajčak, the EU special envoy for the Belgrade-Pristina dialogue, also was invited to that meeting. And the Lajčak was the one who announced that the chief negotiators in the dialogue would meet on May 13 to continue discussions.

## **Introduction**

The dialogue between Belgrade and Priština is lagging again. Both sides have repeatedly delayed the implementation of these agreements. The Serbian government's procrastination is motivated by the Serbian public's strong refusal to recognize Kosovo's independence, as well as the belief that time can be bought by Western powers' perception that Vučić's regime - which has nationalist credentials - is a strong grip on power and ability to control narratives bringing the normalization process to an end.

Similarly, the Kosovo government's position has been influenced by the dominant public perception that after being recognized by more than 100 countries, including major Western powers. Additionally, since Albin Kurti, who built his political career on opposing dialogue with Serbia, became prime minister, the Kosovo government has adopted a rather inflexible approach marked by the belief that mutual recognition is a precondition for resolving open issues.

Therefore, the political interests of both the Serbian and Kosovo political elites to delay the process overlapped. Such situation is worsen by personal relations of two leaders. The last time that Aleksandar Vučić and Albin Kurti met within the framework of normalization of relations facilitated by the European Union was in July 2021. Both of their two meetings were described as unconstructive, difficult, and un-statesmanlike.

To boost the process, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz invited both Vucic and Kurti to Berlin on the same day for bilateral meetings and for a joint informal dinner in lieu of a proper meeting as part of the dialogue.

The meetings also served for the Chancellor to reiterate EU membership prospects for the region against the backdrop of the war in Ukraine and Russia's increasing influence and its potential destabilizing effects in the Balkans<sup>1</sup>.

### **Berlin meeting outcomes**

The President of Serbia and the German Chancellor discussed the continuation of the dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina, and Scholz said that progress in that process is of great importance, due to the preservation of peace and stability in the Balkans. "All open issues should be resolved within the dialogue. That requires courage and determination, all agreed obligations must be respected, unilateral moves are not useful here", the German chancellor pointed out.

Olaf Scholz said that the Western Balkans has a European future and that it is in the EU's interest for the countries of that region to become members of the Union. In his opinion, the dialogue between Belgrade and Priština inherits great importance and eventually which should lead to a

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<sup>1</sup> Balkan Insight: The time to incentivize the Pristina-Belgrade dialogue is now, Balkan Insight, <http://balkaninsight.com/2022/05/17/the-time-to-incentivize-the-kosovo-serbia-dialogue-is-now/>, accessed on 18/05/2022.

comprehensive agreement. Scholz promised that Germany would support the continuation of negotiations between Serbia and Kosovo.

The German Chancellor also expressed his concern to Vučić because of the “secessionist tendencies” in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which introduced the second biggest security aspect when it comes to the Western Balkans.

In his reaction, Vučić pointed out that the dialogue with Priština is not easy for Serbia. Although Serbia will do best going towards finding the compromise solution but one shouldn't expect that will be plain fulfillment of desires. In their reports, the German media described this statement as “approaching Kosovo”, but for those who follow those negotiations, observed that statement is not new and does not lead to admiration.

When comes to Albin Kurti, he kept the position that a central issue of dialogue should be focused on mutual recognition. Kurti also announced that Kosovo will submit a request for membership in the Council of Europe and the Partnership for Peace, and that they expect the support of Germany for those diplomatic moves<sup>1</sup>.

As one might assume, the topic of Russian special operation also was the topic. Serbia and the European Union “do not agree on every detail” when it comes to sanctions against Russia, but it should not be seen that Belgrade “clearly and unequivocally” advocated the view that the invasion of Ukraine is unacceptable, said Vučić and Scholz after Berlin meeting.

“We have been under sanctions for a whole decade and that is why we have a different sentiment towards sanctions, but Serbia understood the message of Germany and everyone else well,” Vučić said at a press conference. He added that Serbia has declared itself at the United Nations on the issue of

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<sup>1</sup> Third Vučić-Kurti meeting takes place in Berlin, Dialogue to continue, European Western Balkans, <https://europeanwesternbalkans.com/2022/05/05/third-vucic-kurti-meeting-takes-place-in-berlin-dialogue-to-continue/>, accessed on: 07/05/2022.

the legal and political nature of the conflict in Ukraine. “The only statement of Serbia was either unexpected or partially expected, unlike all the others. We have not opened Chapter 31 (in negotiations with the EU) and we have an obligation to gradually align with EU decisions. It is true that Chancellor Scholz was very clear, he repeated the demands of Germany in a very strong way, and that is all I have to say”.

When asked whether the non-imposition of sanctions on Russia will affect Serbia's path to the EU, Scholz briefly answered that it should not be overlooked that Serbia has repeatedly condemned Russia's attack.

“On several occasions, Serbia has clearly and unequivocally represented in the General Assembly of the United Nations the position of the European Union that this is an attack by Russia on Ukraine and that it is unacceptable. The fact that we do not agree in every detail is the topic of our talks, but in the end, that attitude and such behavior of Serbia should not be overlooked”, said Scholz.

Completely different attitude has been taken in Priština. Officials in Priština have joined the restrictions imposed by Europe, although Ukraine does not recognize Kosovo's independence.

No matter to differences between two parties, Berlin meeting at least brought spark of light. Namely, Miroslav Lajčak, the EU special envoy for the Belgrade-Pristina dialogue, who also attended the meeting with Vučić and Kurti, announced that the chief negotiators in the dialogue would meet on May 13 in Brussels to continue discussions.<sup>1</sup> For that round three topics were planned: missing persons, license plates and energetic.

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<sup>1</sup> Lajcak: Chief negotiators to continue discussions on May 13, Tanjug, 5 May 2022, [http://www.tanjug.rs/full-view\\_en.aspx?izb=731714](http://www.tanjug.rs/full-view_en.aspx?izb=731714), accessed on: 10/05/2022.

## Conclusion

By convening this meeting, the first major Balkan task of the new German chancellor has been completed: Vučić and Kurti, politicians in whose hands the solution of the currently biggest political problem in the Balkans - the relations between Belgrade and Priština - came to Berlin.

For Germany, this meeting emerged as an opportunity to reiterate EU support for the region and bring new impetus to the dialogue process. <sup>1</sup>This reads as a determination to further strengthen the sphere of influence of Germany and the European Union in the Western Balkans. The resolution of the Kosovo-Serbia dispute remains important for stability in the Balkans and is seen as a way to reduce and isolate Russia's influence in the region. The final agreement between Kosovo and Serbia will not only bring lasting stability to the conflict-stricken region, but will also take away Russia's influence. This will allow the countries of the Western Balkans to be firmly anchored in Euro-Atlantic institutions.

Apart from regular statements about the improvement of economic and political relations, then about the citizens of the two countries who live and work in Germany and who serve as a “bridge between homeland and Germany”, the focus was on the continuation of frozen negotiations between Belgrade and Priština. Speaking of the quality of relations between two parties, they are at the lowest level since 2013 when the Brussels Agreement<sup>2</sup> was signed.

A special meeting between Aleksandar Vučić and Albin Kurti, which was held in the evening in the presence of Miroslav Lajčák, the European

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<sup>1</sup> Nemačka gura pregovore Srbije i Kosova, Deutsche Welle, 4. maj 2022, <https://www.dw.com/sr/nema%C4%8Dka-gura-pregovore-srbije-i-kosova/a-61687812>, accessed on: 10/05/2022.

<sup>2</sup> First Agreement of Principles Governing the Normalization of Relations, The Government of the Republic of Serbia, <https://www.srbija.gov.rs/cinjenice/en/120394>, accessed on: 10/05/2022.

Union's special envoy for negotiations between Belgrade and Priština, gave additional weight to previous meetings in the chancellery.

Apart from feeling very much burdened with problematic historical heritage, the main reason for such a long, arduous process is that the leaders of both sides see the dialogue as an imposed work process, and the introduction of the required process is unknown. One of the main consequences of this understanding is the lack of transparency in the process, about which citizens are not sufficiently informed.

This long-running endeavor - marked by numerous failures - has been virtually halted for two years, after the so-called Kosovo government imposed an embargo on Serbian goods and reached dozens of agreements regulating a wide range of issues.

# **Slovak Government at Midterm (April)**

**Peter Csanyi**

## **Summary**

If we want to evaluate the first two years of rule by the coalition created after the 2020 general election, the government lags behind in fulfilling anti-corruption promises. One plus is that the police launched investigations of corruption among prominent figures. However, not even one third of the anti-corruption pledges made by the government have been fulfilled halfway through its tenure. From the 24 most important pledges the ruling politicians made, the cabinet ministers have managed to pass only seven of them. At the same time, most of them were adopted during the first year of the government's rule. The tempo of adopting changes to fight corruption slowed down significantly during the second year of its tenure. The upcoming regional and municipal elections will be very important, because they will show the country's mood and attitude towards PM Eduard Heger's government.

## **Introduction**

Two years have passed since the Ordinary People and Independent Personalities (OLaNO) party led a new coalition into government in Slovakia. The time since then was mostly dominated by the Covid-19 pandemic and the effort to end it through vaccination. However, just when it seemed the threat from the pandemic might be about to recede, the war in neighboring Ukraine began, leaving Slovakia scrambling to handle the refugees fleeing across the border. The government at midterm has had some anti-corruption achievements, but obviously the coalition could have done more. At least, the ruling parties are united in their stance on the war in Ukraine, but struggling to deal with its consequences.



## **Two-year anniversary of the current government**

We can say that the two years of rule so far have been the most challenging in the modern history of Slovakia. The next term will be crucial in determining whether Slovakia returns to a government of corruption and decay or continue to move forward. Even though observers applaud the government for its strong and unanimous support for Ukraine, they note that the government could have done more to fulfil the anti-corruption pledges which helped propel OĽaNO to victory in the February 2020 election.

However, frankly saying, the fight against corruption could do better. Not even one-third of the government's anti-corruption pledges have been fulfilled as of the current halfway point in its tenure. Observers note that the biggest change visible under the four-party coalition of OĽaNO, Sme Rodina, Freedom and Solidarity (SaS) and Za Ľudí is that the police now have “untied hands” to investigate suspicions of corruption at the highest levels of the state and its institutions. When it comes to the fight against corruption, we can see the biggest progress in the investigation of cases led by the National Criminal Agency (NAKA) and the Special Prosecutor's Office.

Certainly, the government went through a historically difficult time when it first had to face the Covid-19 pandemic and then the war conflict in Ukraine, its economic impacts and refugee crisis. However this cannot be used as an excuse for meeting only a few goals of the anti-corruption part of the program statement. On the other hand, Slovakia improved its position in the corruption index.

The government managed to pass less than one third of the systemic measures they had promised to adopt. Key reforms should be adopted during the first two years of tenure. From the 24 most important pledges the ruling politicians made, the cabinet ministers have managed to pass

only seven of them. At the same time, most of them were adopted during the first year of the government's rule. The tempo of adopting changes to fight corruption slowed down significantly during the second year of its tenure.

The most important one are the adoption of the law concerning the forfeiture of property, the reform of disciplinary proceedings, changes to the practices of checking the property of judges, and steps to make the Office for the Protection of Whistleblowers functional through electing its leading representatives.

On the other hand, the coalition is divided when it comes to other promises, particularly the adoption of the new court map or the change to the criticized Article 363 of the Criminal Code that has been used by the general prosecutor and his office several times to cancel criminal charges against prominent figures. Another unfulfilled promise concerns changes to nominating politicians to certain public functions.

The upcoming regional and municipal elections will show the country's mood. Eventful 2022 expected in Slovakia PM Heger will mark one year in his post. Observers agree he is most likely to stay. Last year we saw a major political crisis in Slovakia, which resulted in the resignation of the prime minister. 2022 is unlikely to see a similar event. Even so, this may still turn out to be a turbulent year for the Slovak political scene. PM Eduard Heger's position in the prime ministerial chair seems to be steady and the survival of the ruling coalition as very likely, given that it is in the interest of all those involved. Early elections are thus an unlikely development; but in autumn of 2022 voters will still be asked to turn out in the polling stations for two elections, which will hint at the mood in the country and possible future alliances at national-level politics.

The development may be turbulent given the broad-spectrum coalition and the pandemic situation. The autumn elections to be the political highlight of the year on the Slovak political scene, while 2022 will also be a year of struggle for the reforms within the EU Recovery Plan. Analysts cite the

ongoing investigation and prosecution of major corruption cases among the expected highlights. Some also worry about growing extremist tendencies and predict that conflicts among society are likely to deepen.

PM Eduard Heger marked his first year in the post on April 1, 2022. In 2021, he swapped positions with Igor Matovič, who took over as finance minister after Heger, as a solution to the political crisis that followed the purchase of the EMA-unapproved Sputnik vaccine. Heger has been described as the prime minister of compromises and reconciliation.

Anyway, the upcoming elections will show the voters' mood. PM Eduard Heger and his cabinet have approximately a half a year to convince the Slovak voters. In a fact it was already proposed that the election could take place earlier than originally planned. As the elections will be joint regional and municipal, a date in accordance with the time period defined in the law for both elections needs to be found. The only date to fulfil these parameters would be somewhere around All Saint's Day. The Interior Ministry has now proposed that elections take place in the last 21 days of the election period instead of the current 14 days.

Regarding the upcoming regional and municipal elections the Interior Ministry has started to deal with the question of how to ensure the votes of people in isolation because of COVID. The ministry proposed that people ordered to stay in isolation by the Public Health Authority because of COVID as of September 30 be able to participate in the election. The ministry submitted a proposal of a law regarding a special way of voting in the election to the interdepartmental review procedure. The ministry argues that they need to accept the law before the date of the election is stated so there is enough time to ensure the implementation of measures needed. The law proposal reads that entitled voters, which also includes foreigners with permanent residence in Slovakia for the regional and municipal election, should request a special way of voting. According to the proposed law, two members of a special election committee should visit voters in isolation at their permanent or temporary residence with a ballot box and ballot papers.

The special voting process will not be conducted in health facilities where healthcare is provided in beds.

Regarding the current war in Ukraine, the parliament approved new legislation for further helping Ukrainian refugees. Refugees also do not have to pay municipal taxes and can open a bank account without the usual documents. A law called Lex Ukraine, aimed at making the life of Ukrainian refugees in Slovakia easier, was approved by parliament.

The measures introduced by the law are related to health care, benefits for those who accommodate Ukrainians, gaining a job in schools as well as the defense and security of Slovakia. There were also introduced financial contributions and scholarships. Taking into consideration the maximum workload of the police services deciding on temporary protection stays for refugees from Ukraine, a time limit is set within which all granted temporary, permanent or tolerated stays, which would expire during an emergency situation, will remain valid until two months after the emergency situation is lifted. The Lex Ukraine law will also allow the provision of personal data of foreigners without their consent. Those could be offered to either the diplomatic missions or consular offices of foreign states, if the reason is an offer of help.

## **Conclusion**

The current Slovak government begins the second half of its term. There have been two prime ministers, one pandemic and war on the border – so far. And we cannot forget the fight against corruption. The positive thing is that the police launched investigations of corruption among prominent figures. However, from the 24 most important pledges the ruling politicians made, the cabinet ministers have managed to pass only seven of them. Besides, the ruling parties are united in their stance on the war in Ukraine, but struggling to deal with its consequences. This year will be important for PM Eduard Heger for another reason too. The upcoming regional and

municipal elections will show him the voters' attitude towards him and his government.

# **The Russo-Ukrainian War, the Parliamentary Election, and Their Effects on Slovenian Politics (April)**

**Gašper Pirc**

## **Summary**

Less than a month before the 2022 parliamentary election which after which the winning coalition could be able to form the 15th Government of Slovenia, the pre-election campaign is already underway, and the public discussions and confrontations of the parties are already taking place. Amidst the heat of the campaign, there has been a growing concern for the independence and political neutrality of the national radio and television of Slovenia while the Russo-Ukrainian war has already raging for more than one month, and its economic, social, and political effects are ever more tangible.

## **Background: the Slovenian political situation before the parliamentary election and the roles of COVID-19 epidemic and the Russo-Ukrainian war in pre-election discussions**

Ever since the Slovenian parliamentary election in 2018, Slovenia has endured tense political times. In the beginning of 2020, the Prime Minister of the minority 13th Government Marjan Šarec resigned due to the mounting pressure from opposition, and the lack of cohesion and mutual support of coalitions parties and their partners, and the 14th Government of Slovenia, led by the new Prime Minister Janez Janša of Slovenian Democratic Party was formed a in coalition with Modern Centre Party, New Slovenia, and Democratic Party of Pensioners of Slovenia. The government was confirmed on 13 March 2020, in the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Despite that the new government had the parliamentary majority for the larger part of its term, its term has been marked by several controversies, the lack of public support, criticism from the public and political opposition, and has been occasionally derided by the EU officials and European media due to its manner of public communication and the supposed authoritarian tendencies of the Prime Minister, especially in regards to the political pressure put on some of the key institutions such as the police and national media.

On the other hand, the current government has been highly regarded for its economic performance, and the Slovenian Presidency of the Council of the European Union under the 14th government which took place in the second half of 2021 was regarded as generally successful.

Nevertheless, due to the amount of general opposition, the Slovenian President Borut Pahor called for the new (regular) parliamentary election on the earliest possible date, April 24, 2022.

While it was widely expected that the health situation due to the COVID-19 epidemic and its effects will be in the focus of the pre-election political discussions, the Russo-Ukrainian war which started in the final week of February 2022 soon became the main talking point of the discussions on the manner of political conduct around Europe. Slovenia has not been an exception to that and the war and its immediate and indirect economic, humanitarian, and political effects have already heavily featured in the political debates before the April's election.

### **Pre-election discussions: the first major confrontation between the representatives of the parties on the topic of the critical questions in contemporary society**

On March 30, 2022, the first major radio pre-election confrontation between the presidents (or their representatives) of all Slovenian political parties before the April's parliamentary election took place. The presidents

of the parties gave their views and suggestions at the first radio confrontation on how they assess the consequences of the war in Ukraine and how to limit the rapid rise in prices. They also expressed their opinion on how to deal with the current health issues, especially in regard to the COVID-19 crisis.

While the campaign before the parliamentary election on 24 April is gaining momentum, it is marked by the brutal war on European soil that changed Europe and requires a reflection on the values and policies of the Western world. It is marked by weaknesses in a two-year pandemic in the health system and society at large. In the first of five pre-election confrontations, the presidents of the parties and the newspaper, which appears in all constituencies, presented their opinions on Radio Prvi. The confrontation was led by Špela Novak and Tomaž Celestina.<sup>1</sup>

Regarding the tense situation due to the Russian attack on Ukraine, the president of DeSUS, Ljubo Jasnič, said that the party welcomed every step on the path to peace in Ukraine. Among others, he stated that "the sole culprit for all these wars is the greed of individual countries, the natural resources that need to be brought under their auspices. Our opinion is that we need to be a visionary, a statesman in these things."

Regarding energy issues, the vice-president of the Svoboda Movement, Urška Klakočar Zupančič, said that the party was in favor of the long-term emphasis on green policies, which is related to the demand for phasing out fossil fuels and replacing them with renewable energy sources, especially solar energy. According to her, it is first necessary to take care of the next generations so that they will live in a clean and healthy environment. "If it doesn't, it won't matter how much it costs," she warned.

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<sup>1</sup> Due to the length of the briefing, in the following paragraphs only the opinions of the representatives of the highest-rated and/or current parliamentary parties will be presented. The statements from the presidents of all parties can be found here: <https://www.rtv slo.si/slovenija/parlamentarne-volitve-2022/soocenja/predsedniki-strank-soocili-mnenja-o-vplivih-vojne-v-ukrajini-in-zdravstveni-problematiki/617666> (in Slovene).



The war in Ukraine also raises questions about increasing funding for the Slovenian army. On this issue, the coordinator of the Left, Luka Mesec, called for common sense and rational response. "Slovenia is not militarily endangered and I do not see anyone threatening us militarily in the future. We are surrounded by friendly countries, if we find ourselves in war, we will find ourselves exclusively as a member of NATO," he said. According to him, "every euro we throw in the armor is the euro we lose for hospitals, for pensions, for housing, for the green transition".

"The green transition will definitely be expensive, that's a fact," said LMSŠ president Marjan Šarec. As he pointed out, TEŠ 6 will also have to be closed in future in order to achieve a low carbon level. "Therefore, it will be necessary to discuss nuclear energy, in addition to all renewable sources available in Slovenia," said Šarec while expressing the need for consensus in regards to the critical questions of today.

The President of Naša dežela party Aleksandra Pivec and the former Minister of Agriculture stated: "At the moment, we must be aware that we first need short-term solutions due to current barriers to energy supply. In the long run, we need to consider how Slovenia will achieve greater energy independence". She believes that "it is absolutely necessary to invest more in renewable energy sources and think about starting procedures for the construction of the second block of the Krško nuclear power plant".

Jelka Godec (SDS) said that the Russian attack brought about many changes in the world. She also said that the security of Slovenia and Europe is connected with the security of Ukraine, if it is safe, so will we. In the field of energy, we want to become self-sufficient by building a gas terminal, and in the field of food, by providing family farms with Slovenian food.

Tanja Fajon (SD) said that the Social Democrats are advocates of Ukraine's membership in the European Union. However, she said that Ukraine's promises of membership could be a double-edged sword, as the queue should not be skipped.

It has been confirmed that the Office of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) will be on the mission to assess the course of the parliamentary election. It believed that is also due to OCSE's concern of a rise in verbal accusations between political elements and legal pressure on critical and independent media.

### **The political pressure and possible politicization of the national Radio and Television of Slovenia**

In recent years, there has been a lot of discussion centered on the question of the possible politicization and political pressure on the work of several critical public institutions, including the police and national media. In the last months before the April's parliamentary election, there have been repeated calls from the political opposition that the Radio-Television of Slovenia, the Slovenia's national public broadcasting organization, has undergone significant changes that may be a result of the political pressure and influence from the current government.

At an emergency session convened at the request of the opposition, the Culture Committee discussed current developments regarding RTV Slovenia, which the proponents see as a political undermining of the institution's institutional autonomy. The coalition disagreed.

The parties LMŠ, SD, Levica, SAB and the parliamentary group of unaffiliated deputies prepared seven resolutions as proposers, urging the management of RTV Slovenia to take into account the applicable legislation and the majority opinion of journalists when appointing candidates for leading positions.

They also wanted to call on the government to immediately stop putting pressure on the editorial independence and institutional autonomy of RTV Slovenia and to re-establish the conditions for independent work of journalists. His communication office is expected to immediately stop

methodologically unprofessionally analyzing the reporting of RTV Slovenia, as they see this as an inadmissible interference of the executive branch of government in the independent and autonomous operation of the public service.

The Supervisory Board of RTV Slovenia is to submit to the National Assembly findings related to the allegations of employees at RTV Slovenia about arbitrary conduct, discrediting employees and politically motivated personnel changes in management. The Program Council of RTV Slovenia would call for impartial and professional work in accordance with the RTV Act.

Furthermore, the Minister of Culture Vasko Simoniti would be called upon to make a public statement on the situation on RTV Slovenia, which in their opinion is unsustainable and leads to the centralization of power and the creation of conditions for the political instrumentalisation of public service.

The coalition and the SNS party did not agree with the allegations and appeals of the opposition, so the proposed resolutions were not adopted.

LMŠ MP Lidija Divjak Mirnik, as a representative of the proposers, said that they wanted to prevent public RTV from becoming state-run, as it is an institution of special national and cultural importance, important for the identity of the Slovenian nation.

The president of the workers' council of RTV Slovenia, Petra Bezjak Cirman, said that it was time for politics to withdraw completely from the public institution.

## **Conclusion**

While there have been several developments which could be featured in April's briefing on the latest developments in the Slovenian politics, including the governmental regulation of the prices of energy products and

the continuation of the regular protests against the current government which are gaining on the intensity in the week before the election, the effects of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, and the political pressure on the critical public institution may have overshadowed the other developments in the past month.

There is still a lot of unknowable variables that are in play before the April's election. The public opinion agencies continue to favor SDS and the new coming Svoboda Movement as the most realistic coalition leaders after the election, but the KUL parties may also likely be present in critical roles during the formation of the new government.

Regardless of how the rest of the pre-election campaign will look like, however, it is clear that the effects of the Russo-Ukrainian war and the long-term effect of COVID-19 crisis will need to be carefully considered during and after the formation of the 15<sup>th</sup> Slovenian government.



