



Weekly Briefing

Slovakia political briefing:

Slovak politicians launch new political parties before snap elections

Peter Csanyi

China-CEE Institute

Kiadó: Kína-KKE Intézet Nonprofit Kft.

Szerkesztésért felelős személy: Ju Weiwei

Kiadásért felelős személy: Feng Zhongping

 1052 Budapest Petőfi Sándor utca 11.

 +36 1 5858 690

 office@china-cee.eu

 china-cee.eu

Slovak politicians launch new political parties before snap elections

Summary

After two years as a Prime Minister of an OĽaNO-led government, Eduard Heger finds the courage to leave the populist movement of Igor Matovič and hopes to establish a new political culture in Slovakia. He became the leader of a new party called Demokrati (Democrats). The party's founding members also include four cabinet ministers from his former OĽaNO party.

A quarter of a century after he became the man who buried the semi-authoritarian regime of Vladimír Mečiar, the former Slovakian Prime Minister, Mikuláš Dzurinda, has also announced a new party (Modrí - 'Blues - European Slovakia'). Claiming he feels the imperative and responsibility to be of service to his country once again, Dzurinda hopes to pull off another historic win in this year's early election like he did back in 1998, when he rescued democracy from the clutches of Mečiar.

In the meantime, five months in the run-up to the early elections, the Smer-SSD opposition party continues building its base of supporters and reaches unshakeable position in the latest poll.

Introduction

The current interim Slovak Prime Minister Eduard Heger started gearing up for the September general election in the country the establishment of a new pro-Western, liberal centrist party, the Democrats. The new actor will enter an already complicated field ahead of September general election. The election was called by Slovak President Zuzana Čaputová following the loss of a no-confidence vote by the coalition government that was running the country since the 2020 general election.

The ex-PM Mikuláš Dzurinda has also founded a new political party called 'Blues - European Slovakia'. The Blues party is interested in uniting with others and wants to contribute to a positive change in the social climate and to solutions that will bring benefits and satisfaction to the public. The Blues wants to be a center-right party of a conservative-liberal type.

An overall theme of the election will be the long-lasting divide between pro-Western forces and pro-Russian ones, the latter led by far right parties and Smer-SSD party, all in favor of ending Slovak support for Ukraine. Latest polls place Hlas-SD ahead, with Smer-SSD following. With Heger closing the door to a possible alliance with Hlas-SD, current predictions make it hard to envisage a Western-leaning government after the vote.

Attempts of the Slovak center-right political spectrum to mobilize the voters

On top of the highest inflation recorded in 30 years, Slovaks last year had to put up with constant political conflicts within the previous ruling coalition, which led to the collapse of Eduard Heger's government after it lost a vote of no-confidence several days before Christmas.

Six weeks later, Mikuláš Dzurinda appeared in front of the press presenting on the Blue Coalition (Modrá koalícia) – a new political formation that came out of the recent merging of his team and MP Miroslav Kollár's small non-parliamentary SPOLU party, which has negligible support in the polls. The announcement came less than a week before a parliamentary vote set September 30 as the date for an early election and gave Heger's interim cabinet restricted powers to govern until November.

Experts say the later election date will benefit new and smaller parties, giving them more time to make themselves known to the public and form electoral coalitions. Case in point: Dzurinda is hoping to form a bloc of democratic parties in an effort to prevent as many people's votes as possible from being unrepresented in parliament – though an unsuccessful coalition could bring about the opposite effect – and to pre-empt populists and extremists from taking power or even winning a constitutional majority of at least 90 seats in the 150-seat house. Nostalgia for the Dzurinda era lasting from 1998 to 2006, when the ex-prime minister transformed Slovakia from Mečiar's "black hole of Europe" into Europe's "economic tiger", as well as voters' frustration with current center-right parties could indeed work to the Blue Coalition's advantage. However, so far, observers and the party's potential partners have not taken the bait.

The Blue Coalition has published its "10 Blue Commandments", which define the party's values and basic principles, such as the promise to remain pro-European, support innovation and reforms, and stay out of matters like religion or sexual orientation.

However, seven months before early elections, interim Prime Minister Eduard Heger has also become leader of a new political party, what meant the end of Dzurinda's Blue Coalition! On the night of March 6, 2023 Heger announced that he was leaving the ruling OĽaNO party, led by his friend, populist MP and ex-Prime Minister Igor Matovič. PM Heger has his own vision of politics and he wants to go his own way. The next day, Heger officially joined the Blue Coalition (Modrá Koalícia), led by MP Miroslav Kollár, becoming its leader and replacing Kollár. The MP will serve as deputy leader of the party. The Blue Coalition simultaneously changed its name to Demokrati (Democrats).

After announcing his new party, however, the opposition camp began questioning the legitimacy of Heger's interim cabinet and accusing the prime minister of committing a "fraud" on voters, since Demokrati has never taken part in any election. The opposition is now urging the president to remove the interim government and replace it with a caretaker government until the early election set for September 30.

On the day Heger presented his vision for Slovakia, he also named the parties that Demokrati would not cooperate with. These include far-right and nationalist movements, as well as the populist Smer-SSD and Hlas-SD parties. Yet he did not rule out cooperating with OĽaNO, despite his vision of seeing a return to dialogue, decency and professionalism in politics, which is hardly in line with how OĽaNO and its leader Matovič see politics.

On the other side, five months in the run-up to the early elections, the Smer-Slovak Social Democracy (SSD) opposition party continues building its base of supporters. It has yet again come first in the latest poll at the end of March.

The party, led by former three-time prime minister Robert Fico, would have obtained 22.4 percent - the best result for the party since spring 2019. Fico's aggressive style of campaigning, mastering of social topics, and pro-Russian views appear to be appealing to many. This despite a number of people charged with or sentenced for corruption or other crimes committed under the previous Smer-SSD-led governments.

Peter Pellegrini's Hlas-SD came second in the poll with 14.2 percent. For Hlas-SD, the polled number is the lowest in its young history. This is possibly the outcome of Pellegrini's declining visibility and unclear views on various topics, including vaccination against Covid-19 and the transfer of grounded Soviet-made jets to Ukraine.

Still, Smer-SSD and Hlas-SD might form a powerful ruling coalition if they take Republika aboard. With this far-right party, they could have 85 seats in the 150-seat parliament.

The liberal party Progressive Slovakia ended in third place with 12.8 percent. Republika came fourth. The Christian Democratic Movement (KDH), Speaker Boris Kollár's populist party Sme Rodina, Igor Matovič's populist movement OĽaNO, and the Freedom and Solidarity (SaS) party would also win parliamentary seats, according to the poll.

Conversely, the acting PM Eduard Heger's new party Demokrati (Democrats) would not make it to parliament, nor would ex-PM Mikuláš Dzurinda's project Modrí-Európske Slovensko (Blue-European Slovakia).

Conclusion

The announcement of a new political party by the interim Prime Minister Eduard Heger seven months before the elections was surprising. Although, in fact, Demokrati (Democrats) is not a completely new party, but rather has changed its name to Demokrati from Modrá Koalícia (Blue Coalition), which was MP Miroslav Kollár's small non-parliamentary party. Former Prime Minister Mikuláš Dzurinda and his "Blue" group initially planned to join forces with Kollár's party in the run-up to the September election, with the aim of uniting center-right parties to stop Robert Fico's Smer-SSD and Peter Pellegrini's Hlas-SD, a party of Smer renegades, from winning the election. In the end, misunderstandings with Kollár led Dzurinda to start working on a new political party called The Blues.

Despite Heger and Dzurinda struggling to attract much trust among voters, neither of them is giving up on their ambitions to unite politicians from centrist parties, particularly from smaller parties. Yet observing the political scene several months out from the election, political scientists are not surprised by a lack of willingness to merge at the moment. In the past, different politicians shared the same ambition as elections drew nearer. Those ambitions often failed, though.

References

AFP Europe (2023): Slovak PM launches new party before snap elections. Available at: <https://www.aneews.com.tr/europe/2023/03/07/slovak-pm-launches-new-party-before-snap-elections>

Dlhopolec, P. (2023): A former Slovak PM's comeback hits a blue note. Available at: <https://balkaninsight.com/2023/02/15/a-former-slovak-pms-comeback-hits-a-blue-note/>

Dlhopolec, P. (2023): Interim PM Heger leaves ruling party, finds new political home. Available at: <https://spectator.sme.sk/c/23143980/slovak-prime-minister-heger-new-political-party-elections.html?ref=temacl>

Dlhopolec, P. (2023): With his new party, Slovak PM embarks on a mission to unify. Available at: <https://balkaninsight.com/2023/03/20/with-his-new-party-slovak-pm-embarks-on-a-mission-to-unify/>

Fracassi, G. (2023): Slovakia PM enters election fray with new party. Available at: <https://www.europeaninterest.eu/article/slovakia-pm-enters-election-fray-with-new-party/>

POLITICO (2023): Slovakia — National parliament voting intention. Available at: <https://www.politico.eu/europe-poll-of-polls/slovakia/>

TASR (2023): Dzurinda's 'Blues' Party Collects 12,861 Signatures, Applies for Registration (2). Available at: <https://www.tasr.sk/tasr-clanok/TASR:2023040600000284>

Terenzani, M. (2023): Dzurinda's blues do not mean he's done with politics. Available at: <https://spectator.sme.sk/c/23143348/dzurindas-blues-do-not-mean-hes-done-with-politics.html?ref=temacl>