

SLOVAK PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS JUNE 2010

Prime Minister Fico's governing SMER will go into opposition, unable to find a coalition partner with which to govern. SMER received a remarkable 35% of the popular vote, giving it 62 seats in the 150 seat parliament. SMER came within a whisker of being able to form a government. Of its two previous coalition partners, SNS just scraped in and LS-HZDS just failed. If LS-HZDS had won a handful more votes and jumped the 5% threshold, Fico would remain in power with his two old allies.

Party		%	Seats
SMER-SD	Social Democratic Party	34.79	62
SDKU-DS	Slovak Christian and Democratic Union	15.42	28
SaS	Freedom and Solidarity	12.14	22
KDH	Christian-Democratic Union	8.52	15
Most-Hid	Civic Hungarian Party	8.12	14
SNS	Slovak Nationalist Party	5.07	9
SMK	Party of Hungarian Coalition	4.33	0
LS-HZDS	Movement for a Democratic Slovakia	4.32	0
Turnout		58.83	150

As it is, four smaller anti-Fico parties will now attempt to form an "austerity" coalition. With 79 seats, this combination would hold a parliamentary majority of just four votes. The narrowness of the victory of the anti-Fico coalition is underlined by the concentration of its support around the capital city Bratislava. Otherwise, Slovakia voted largely for SMER.

Fico is a victim of his own success. Over the last four years, SMER has cannibalised its two allies, LS-HZDS and SNS, with the result that Fico is left without coalition partners. A more strategic approach would have been to allow LS-HZDS and SNS more scope to appeal to voters and thus win a new parliamentary mandate. A similar mistake was made by SMER's Czech equivalent, the CSSD, with a too dominant leader crowding out potential partners.

In terms of public perceptions, the leaders of SMER and CSSD had become too strong for their own good. An important lesson from the Czech and Slovak elections is that, in a time of widespread public disaffection with mainstream parties, some degree of controlled fragmentation is essential to scoop up protest votes. Both SMER and CSSD failed to grasp this, presumably because of the self-aggrandizing personalities of their leaders, with the result that protest voters had little choice but to turn to centre right parties like TOP 09 and VV in the Czech Republic and SaS in Slovakia.

Another common feature of the two countries is the capital city-centric nature of the protest vote. SMER and CSSD each dominate their countries, with Slovakia's SDKU and the Czech TOP 09 both depending for their support largely upon the capital city and its environs. The likely new Slovak government is far from representative in this sense, and this will lead to problems in the future.

Talks between **SDKU**, **SaS**, **KDH** and **Most-Hid** have begun, and in spite of differing positions on social issues, the parties more or less agree on the outlines of an austerity package. Even so, the stability of such a

coalition is threatened by its narrow majority and the internal tensions within each party. Much will depend upon SMER's long term ambitions. In government, Fico was able to maintain party discipline through the selective distribution of rents. In opposition and deprived of access to public funds, the party may struggle to hold together. If Fico is really motivated to prevent SMER from fragmenting, he could succeed in splitting the four-party coalition and bring the new government down mid-term.

SDKU-DS has two leaders in effect and it remains to be seen how this will resolve itself. Iveta Radicova, who took over the election campaign but not the chairmanship of the party, will likely become prime minister. Mikulas Dzurinda remains the party chairman and will now seek to reassert his authority.

SaS: Founded only 18 months ago by Richard Sulik, an advisor to the finance ministry, stands for radical reform of the tax and social security system. The single-issue character of the party remains its biggest weakness.

KDH: The Christian Democrats were hoping to do better with former EU commissioner Jan Figel as their new leader. Over the past four years, KDH has become less socially conservative, while strengthening its economic focus. This partial reinvention of itself failed to translate into significantly more votes. This is due to the fact that the centre right-leaning protest voters had three or four parties to choose from.

Most-Hid: A breakaway party from SMK, led by its former chairman Bela Bugar. Unlike SMK, Most-Hid set out to appeal to both Hungarians and Slovaks, to serve as a bridge between the two ethnic communities. In addition to its charismatic chairman, Most-Hid was able to capitalise on the escalation of political tensions fuelled by SNS in government and a more radical SMK.

SMK: SMK always used to be an umbrella party for ethnic Hungarian voters, winning around 10 percent of the vote. Given a choice, Hungarian voters opted for the more accommodating tone of the new Most-Hid. SMK leadership resigned immediately after the elections.

SNS: Slovak Nationalist Party only just scraped into parliament, with many of its former voters switching to SMER.

LS-HZDS: The party of former prime minister Vladimir Meciar failed to get into the parliament for the first time ever, with many of its voters lost to SMER. The party is likely to disappear. Like SNS, LS-HZDS was a victim of its too strong coalition partner SMER.