

Neo-fascist wins regional election in Slovakia

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At the end of November, right-wing extremist Marian Kotleba won the runoff election for the presidency of the regional administration in Banská Bystrica in central Slovakia. Kotleba won 55.2 percent of the vote, against 44.5 percent for the social democratic incumbent, Vladimir Manka. Turnout was just 24.6 percent.

The region has 660,000 inhabitants and covers about one eighth of Slovak territory. As regional president, Kotleba will be responsible for the control of schools, among other things.

Kotleba's election victory came as a surprise. His People's Party of Slovakia (LSNS) had received only 1.6 percent of the vote in the parliamentary elections two years ago. In the first round of the regional elections, 21.3 percent voted for Kotleba and 49.5 percent for Manka. In the second round, Manka was supported by a broad alliance ranging from his social democratic Smer to the conservatives. Nevertheless, very likely due to this coalition of forces, Kotleba then prevailed in the second round.

The 36-year-old neo-Nazi usually wears a black uniform, and his supporters call him "Führer" (leader). He has been in court several times for disseminating racist propaganda but was always acquitted. Two of his previous parties were banned for being unconstitutional.

In his election campaign, Kotleba conducted tirades against the Roma minority and attacked the European Union (EU). He called the Roma parasites, anti-social elements and murderers who subsisted at government expense, and demanded the withdrawal of all benefits for them.

He called for Slovakia's withdrawal from the EU and NATO, which he described as a "terrorist organisation"; the reintroduction of the Krone as the national currency; the preferable treatment of investment from Slovaks rather than foreign investors;

and the restructuring of the budget by ending foreign missions by Slovak soldiers. At the same time, he engaged in social demagogic and spoke out against the privatisation of public enterprises.

The establishment parties subsequently blamed each other for Kotleba's victory. Social Democratic prime minister Robert Fico blamed the conservative parties, who he said had defamed him during the campaign. If you believe "the Antichrist, Satan, Hitler and Mussolini are better" than his Smer, you should not be surprised if right-wing voters elect right-wing extremists, Fico said. At the same time, he criticised the media; their reporting was tantamount to election advertising for the right-wing extremists, he claimed.

The Slovak daily *SME* attributed Kotleba's success to a "mixture of hatred, impotence and indignation" against the country's elite. The electoral success of the extreme right does indeed express the widespread rejection of the establishment parties—whether social democratic or conservative.

In six of the eight Slovak regions, candidates of the ruling party Smer prevailed, while in the region including the capital Bratislava a conservative candidate won. But turnout averaged 17.3 percent, even lower than in Banská Bystrica, and in several areas it was below 10 percent.

For years, Fico's ruling Smer as well as the preceding right-wing governments have imposed the brutal austerity measures dictated from Brussels. The result is high unemployment, widespread poverty and lack of opportunities. Officially, 14 percent of Slovaks are unemployed and 15 percent are threatened by poverty. According to the Slovak Statistical Office, nearly 715,000 residents of the country's 5.5 million inhabitants live at or below the poverty line of €4,156 per year, or €346 a month. For this reason, the social democrats, the conservatives and the institutions of the EU are widely hated.

Kotleba could appeal to this hatred, and with his campaign against Roma, could attack the policies of the establishment parties. Making this disadvantaged and persecuted minority a scapegoat for the social misery is now part of the standard repertoire of all bourgeois politicians. French interior minister Manuel Valls uses it, as does his German counterpart, Hans-Peter Friedrich.

Between 2006 and 2010, Fico's Smer had formed a coalition with the Slovak National Party, which is just as hostile to Roma as Kotleba's Our Slovakia.

In neighbouring Hungary, Jobbik, another openly fascist party, is represented in parliament. It works closely with the government of Victor Orban and supports his policies, which include drastic spending cuts and the abolition of democratic rights.



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