

Slovak prime minister Robert Fico shot in assassination attempt

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Yesterday afternoon, populist Slovak Prime Minister Robert Fico was shot while visiting the town of Handlova after a meeting of his government.

Surrounded by security guards, Fico had gone to meet a handful of supporters who had gathered to see him, when someone shot him repeatedly at point-blank range with a handgun, identified as a pistol or short-barreled rifle. Fico was rushed to a hospital in Banska Bystrica, 30 kilometers away, by helicopter. After a three-hour operation, Fico's condition was stabilized, but his life was still reported this afternoon to be in danger.

At the scene, Fico's security guards seized a man identified by Slovak media as Juraj Chintula, a 71-year-old former writer who has worked as a security guard and a taxi driver. Today, Slovak police charged Chintula with premeditated attempted murder, which carries a sentence of 25 years to life in prison.

The shooting was a politically-motivated assassination attempt. While there are conflicting reports about Chintula's views, this attempted murder is bound up with deep political and class tensions in Slovakia and across Eastern Europe, inflamed by the NATO-Russia war in neighboring Ukraine. Fico has criticized NATO's war on Russia in Ukraine, which is widely unpopular in Slovakia, but is slashing social spending in order to arm the Slovak military.

Currently, there are no indications that the assassination attempt was prepared by a broader organization or conspiracy, although this possibility cannot be ruled out. Chintula reportedly owned a handgun legally, having worked as a security guard. He had an erratic but essentially far-right political trajectory, having criticized violence before recently sympathizing with the liberal, pro-NATO opposition party Progressive Slovakia (PS).

A video posted on social media and on the web site of

the former Slovak Stalinist daily *Pravda* showed Chintula, apparently under police interrogation, criticizing the Fico government and its authoritarian restructuring of the courts and state media in line with PS positions. Chintula's views on the NATO-Russia war in Ukraine have not yet been clearly reported, however.

"I am not in agreement with the policy of the government," Chintula said, adding: "Why is RTVS [Slovak Radio and Television] under attack? Why has judge Mazak [the former president of the Slovak Magistrates Council] been fired?"

Chintula reportedly founded the Duha ("Rainbow") Literary Club, published poetry and novels, and joined the Slovak Writers Association (SSS) in 2015. According to press reports, Chintula's 2015 novel *Efata* denounces Slovakia's Roma minority along far-right lines, attacking the Slovak state for tolerating the Roma's alleged abuse of social programs.

Yesterday, the SSS issued a statement condemning the attempted assassination of Fico: "We express our indignation at such a brutal act, which has no parallel in the history of Slovakia."

In 2016, Chintula founded a small party, paradoxically named *Hnutie proti násiliu* ("Movement against violence"). He called to be "dissatisfied, but not violent" and attacked Fico's SMER-Social Democracy party for not improving values and morality: "What is the state doing, the party whose name proclaims it to be social? Nothing! The state is not solving the question of begging by law."

There were initial reports, by Hungarian investigative journalist Szabolcs Panyi, that Chintula met the pro-Russian Slovenski Branci ("Slovak Soldiers") militia in 2016. This led to several reports in European media that Chintula supported Russia in the war. Many of

these reports have now been taken down, however, and the Slovak daily *Dennik N* reports that Chintula met the Slovenski Branci to ask them not to use violence.

There were numerous reports on social media that in the recent period, Chintula sympathized with the pro-NATO PS. Yesterday, PS chairman Michal Simecka felt compelled to issue a statement denying that Chintula was a PS member: “We unequivocally deny that he is a member of our movement. There is no link between him and our party or its members. We firmly condemn his odious action.”

Whatever Chintula’s precise opinions, the explosive political climate in which he decided to act is the product of two years of NATO-Russia war in Ukraine. Fico has criticized the war and called for peace talks, trying to accommodate popular opposition to the war, while agreeing to NATO and European Union (EU) initiatives to fund and arm the far-right Ukrainian regime. The PS has attacked Fico, demanding an aggressive waging of the NATO war and denouncing Fico for alleged mob ties, as well as his attacks on state media and the courts.

Political tensions are extremely high after last year’s Slovak parliamentary elections and this April’s presidential elections, both won by Fico and his ex-Stalinist or far-right nationalist allies. The response to the shooting of Fico of both the Fico government and the liberal opposition has been to rally together to appeal for calm.

Slovakia is “on the edge of civil war,” Slovak Interior Minister Matus Sutaj-Estok said last night, at a joint press conference on the shooting with Defense Minister Robert Kalinak. He added: “Such hateful comments are being made on social networks today, so please, let’s stop this immediately.”

Today, outgoing Slovak President Zuzana Caputova (PS) and incoming President Peter Pellegrini, a Fico ally, held a joint press conference, appealing for calm. Criticizing a “vicious circle of hate” and attacking the assassination attempt as “an attack on the democratic establishment,” Caputova said she wanted to “send a signal” amid “this tense situation.” She called on Slovak political leaders to “calm the situation and reject violence.”

Pellegrini urged “all political parties in Slovakia to temporarily suspend or considerably reduce their European election campaign,” arguing that Slovakia

must avoid “further confrontation.”

The shooting of Fico is indubitably reactionary, but SMER and PS calls for calm are no less bankrupt than Chintula’s earlier moral outbursts against violence. Pellegrini won the presidential elections as a Fico ally, pledging not to let Slovakia be dragged into the Ukraine war. However, Slovakia is being dragged ever deeper into war with Russia, because it and most other Eastern European states, in the 1990s or 2000s, joined NATO and the EU—the organizations now leading the imperialist war with Russia in Ukraine.

The only progressive way forward in Slovakia and across Europe is the building of an international, socialist anti-war movement, based on Trotskyist opposition to the counterrevolutionary role of Stalinism.

The restoration of capitalism by the Stalinist regimes in Eastern Europe in 1989, like the subsequent Stalinist dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, has produced a catastrophe. While the NATO imperialist powers have played the former Soviet republics against each other, ultimately arming Ukraine for a bloody and disastrous war with Russia, they also impose a brutal capitalist austerity diktat across Eastern Europe. In Slovakia, public spending is to be cut 30 percent to finance defense spending, while inflation is surging, impoverishing workers.

This is exemplified in the career of Fico, a former Stalinist who formed his social-democratic SMER party in 1999. Fico continually incited anti-immigrant hatreds with nationalist rhetoric and repeatedly formed alliances with far-right forces, such as the Slovak National Party (SNS), which currently is part of Fico’s government alongside Pellegrini’s Hlas (“Voice”) party.

While European media still occasionally refer to Fico as a “left” president, his relentless promotion of Slovak nationalism fueled the reactionary fascistic prejudices and created the political conditions for the assassination attempt against him.



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