

# Stalemate following parliamentary elections in Slovenia

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After the parliamentary election on March 22, difficult coalition negotiations and a fragile governing coalition appear imminent in Slovenia.

The outgoing government, comprising the liberal Freedom Movement (GS), the Social Democrats (SD) and the Left Party (Levica), no longer has a majority of its own. GS, led by incumbent Prime Minister Robert Golob, came out on top with 28.6 percent, but only by the narrowest of margins ahead of Janez Janša's right-wing conservative Democratic Party (SDS), which secured 28 percent. Even with the votes of the Social Democrats (6.7 percent) and the "left-wing" electoral alliance Levica-Vesna (5.5 percent), Golob does not have a majority in parliament.

A right-wing alliance comprising the SDS, a three-party right-wing conservative electoral alliance and the SDS splinter group Democrats also lacks a majority of its own. The far-right party Resni.ca (Truth) with 5.5 percent could now become the kingmaker. The party was formed at the height of the coronavirus pandemic by anti-vaxxers and coronavirus deniers, and combines social backwardness with hate speech against migrants. Like the SDS, it also maintains close ties to openly fascist circles.

Yet this has not deterred Golob from a possible coalition with the far right. On Friday, he invited the leaders of all parties and alliances represented in the new parliament—with the exception of the SDS—to explore the possibility of a "government of national unity."

The right-wing conservative alliance (New Slovenia (NSi), People's Party (SLS) and Fokus) declined the invitation. It stated that the Golob government had been voted out and that it would only join a government led by the SDS. The remaining parties, on the other hand, offered to work with Golob's GS on an emergency law that would allow them to bypass parliament and pass legislation in the event of protracted coalition negotiations.

Numerous political commentators consider cooperation between the previous coalition partners and Resni.ca or the Democrats to be likely. This would result in a further, significant shift to the right.

The former business executive Golob won the 2022 parliamentary election by a clear margin because the then head of government, Janša, was hated by the population.

Janša began his political career in Slovenia's communist youth organisation. Because he criticised the Yugoslav leadership in Belgrade, he was imprisoned and came to be seen as a symbol of the so-called democracy movement. In 1989, he was one of the founders of the Slovenian Democratic Union (SDZ). During the Yugoslav civil war, he served as Minister of Defence and commander of the Slovenian army.

Since then, the self-styled democrat, who has already served three terms as Slovenian Prime Minister, has shifted further and further to the right. Janša is regarded as an admirer of Donald Trump and a close friend of extreme right Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán. As prime minister, he attacked independent institutions and attempted—like Orbán—to undermine press freedom.

Golob falsely presented himself as the alternative to Janša. In 2022, he was able to mobilise young voters in the larger cities particularly. He promised more democracy, a climate-friendly economic policy and a move away from fossil fuels. Crucially, however, he avoided taking a clear stance on the war in Ukraine, while Janša called for arms deliveries to Ukraine immediately after the outbreak of the war and stoked anti-Russian sentiment.

Upon taking office, Golob changed course. As part of a swap deal with Germany, he supplied tanks and military equipment to Ukraine and called for the delivery of long-range weapons capable of striking targets deep inside Russia. Last year, Golob's government contributed around \$46 million to the Ukrainian air defence PURL

programme.

These funds were squeezed directly from the population of the country, which has only 2.1 million inhabitants. As a result, affected households received only a derisory amount of aid following the devastating floods of 2023. Furthermore, the government slashed pensions and healthcare provision.

At the same time, Golob's government took measures to establish a police state. At the end of last year, it passed the so-called "Šutar Law." This grants the police virtually unlimited powers in so-called "security risk areas." These zones can be designated at the authorities' discretion and primarily affect areas with Roma communities.

The catalyst was the death of 48-year-old Aleš Šutar, who was killed during a brawl outside a nightclub in Novo Mesto, southern Slovenia. The perpetrator belonged to the Roma minority. This led to racist protests by neo-Nazis, which the police failed to stop. Instead, arbitrary police raids took place in Roma settlements.

With the support of the right wing, Golob rushed the law through parliament in record time. It undermines fundamental democratic rights. Even though it is currently only being used against discriminated-against minorities, it serves to suppress any opposition.

Nevertheless, Golob once again attempted to portray himself as a liberal, cosmopolitan and socially minded politician during this election campaign. He was supported in this by the "left-wing" forces within his government, who organised protests against Janša and his closeness to Trump and Orbán, linking this to a call to go to the polls and vote for the government.

Yet this transparent manoeuvre did not achieve the desired success. The support for NATO's war against Russia was too obvious. And whilst Slovenia cautiously criticised the Israeli government's genocide in Gaza and banned arms deliveries to Israel, the government avoided any criticism of the attack on Iran, which violated international law.

In the polls over the past few weeks, Janša was in the lead, until a scandal—presumably orchestrated by Janša himself—backfired. It involved secretly recorded video footage intended to portray the Golob camp as corrupt. Among others, the footage showed a former justice minister from Golob's camp being encouraged to engage in corruption by supposed British investors.

The videos were uploaded to the website of the Israeli firm Black Cube, which maintains links to the Israeli secret service and right-wing European circles. Janša initially denied having anything to do with the matter, but

was later forced to admit that he had contacts with the company.

European Union (EU) circles reacted with a degree of relief to Golob's victory, but at the same time expressed concern about the political instability and the difficult coalition negotiations now facing Slovenia.

Regardless of which political camp ultimately takes over the government in whatever constellation, tensions between the ruling elite and the working population will intensify. Golob and Janša are preparing for fierce social conflicts in view of the tense international situation.

The economic impact of the war in Iran is hitting working-class households hard. The government was recently forced to ration fuel sales in order to keep prices reasonably stable. Other governments in the Balkan countries are taking similar measures.

Last week, Croatia announced a €450 million (\$518 million) package of measures to cushion the impact of rising energy prices. This involves freezing electricity and gas prices. In Serbia, the government is also regulating fuel prices, has passed a ban on fuel exports and released state reserves.

The rising prices coincide with strikes against poor wages and working conditions. Only last month, emergency call centre operators suspended a two-year strike following an agreement with the government. Prior to that, there had been lengthy strikes in the public sector demanding higher wages.

Added to this are redundancies in several industrial sectors, particularly the automotive industry. For instance, the German company Mahle made 600 employees redundant in Slovenia last year. Further redundancies in this sector are already under discussion.



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