



BULLETIN

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COMMENTARY

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Results of Parliamentary Elections in Slovakia

by Rafał Morawiec

The parliamentary elections held in Slovakia on 12 June were won by the right-wing opposition parties. They will probably be able to form a new government, which is likely to introduce changes in Slovak foreign policy that are expected to be beneficial from Poland's point of view.

The party that gained the greatest support in the elections—34.79% of the vote and 62 seats in the 150-seat single-chamber Slovak Parliament—was Prime Minister Robert Fico's SMER-SD, while the true winner is the right-wing opposition, which jointly gained 43.2% of the vote and 79 seats. SMER is not expected to be in a position to form a government, because one of the parties forming the current government coalition—former Prime Minister Vladimir Mečiar's Movement for a Democratic Slovakia (HZDS)—did not cross the 5% parliamentary threshold. Only 5.07% of voters supported Fico's other coalition partner, the nationalist Slovak National Party (SNS), which won nine seats.

It is true that President Ivan Gašparovič invited Fico—as the formal winner of the election—to form a government, but there are reasons to believe that none of the right-wing parties want to enter into a coalition with SMER. Hence a new government will most likely be formed by: the Slovak Democratic and Christian Union (SDKÚ), the Christian-Democratic Movement (KDH) and two new parties: the liberal Freedom and Solidarity party (SaS) and Most-Híd, which is one of two parties representing the Hungarian minority. The other, the Hungarian Coalition Party (SMK), supported by Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's FIDESZ party, which is currently in power in Hungary, did not cross the parliamentary threshold. If these forecasts turn out to be correct, the head of the new government will be SDKÚ leader Iveta Radičová, who replaced two-time Prime Minister Mikuláš Dzurinda last January.

The right-wing opposition's success is mostly the result of public disaffection with the aggressive political style of the current prime minister and numerous corruption scandals and symptoms of clientelism that have become hallmarks of his government. The SMK's defeat and poor result of the SNS in turn mean that voters *de facto* rejected those parties' policies, which had been spreading discord by focusing on nationality issues. This is afforded credence by the success of Most-Híd, a party that had based its manifesto on the idea of conciliation of the Hungarian minority and the Slovaks. As for the defeat of Mečiar's party, whose rule in the 1990s contributed to Slovakia's temporary exclusion from the process of European and transatlantic integration, it confirms a shift in the mood of the Slovak public in the direction chosen by the Czechs in their parliamentary election two weeks earlier. There are reasons to believe that the victory of the Czech right-wing exerted an impact on the results of the election in Slovakia.

The presence of a conciliation-minded party representing the Hungarian minority in the coalition government will be a factor diffusing tensions in Slovak-Hungarian relations, both between ethnic groups and between states. In this respect, however, a lot will depend on the approach taken by Orbán's government, which has openly been demonstrating its sympathetic stance towards the SMK's radical program and is currently expressing readiness to enter into dialogue with the new Slovak government.

The consequences of taking over power by the opposition right-wing will include a major shift in Slovak foreign policy, which will resemble the policy followed by Dzurinda's subsequent center-right cabinets in 1998–2006. This will mean a return to full affirmation of transatlantic relations and the role played therein by the U.S. as a key element of the global security architecture, a departure from blind acceptance of relations with Russia and its actions in its immediate vicinity, as well as changes in the perception of energy security that will be similar to Poland's position on this issue.