

## Great uncertainty in Slovenia just one month prior to the general elections

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Analysis

On 14th March last Slovenian Prime Minister Miro Cerar (Modern Centre Party, SMC) chose to resign from office after the Supreme Court cancelled the referendum of 24th September 2017 which had focused on the construction of a second railway line (27km long) linking Divaca to Koper, Slovenia's only trading port (22 million tonnes in 2016) on the Adriatic Sea. After the vote by the Drzavni Zbor (National Assembly), the lower house of parliament, in support of the second railway line, an organisation called the "Taxpayers should not pay" led by Vili Kovacic, and supported by the opposition parties, gained the necessary number of signatures (2500 then 40,000 the following month) to trigger the organisation of a popular referendum on the issue.

On 24th September a short majority of voters (53.47%) answered "yes" to the question: "Do you approve the construction, the implementation and administration of a second railway line Divaca-Koper as voted by the National Assembly on 8th May 2017?", 46.50% opted for "no". In all 20,55% of the Slovenian population turned out to vote, i.e. just the minimum necessary for the referendum to be deemed valid.

In March the Supreme Court deemed that the government had not fulfilled its duty in terms of neutrality by financing the electoral campaign with public funds.

"The old parties have prevented us from working for future generations," declared Miro Cerar who said he had been "also prevented from succeeding by his partners in the government coalition" – the Social Democrats and the Democratic Party of Pensioners – the opposition, the unions and the Supreme Court etc ... The construction of a second railway line between the towns of Divaca and Koper was one of the government's main projects. A further referendum will take place on the same issue on 13th May next, i.e. three weeks before the general elections.

After the resignation of the head of government, according to the electoral law, the President of the Republic has 30 days to put forward a new candidate for this position. The parties represented in parliament or a group comprising at least 10 MPs can also put a candidate forward. If no candidate is elected by the MPs, parliament is then

dissolved and new general elections are organised within the two months following the dissolution, but not fewer than 40 days after the announcement of the date of the election. The President of the Republic Borut Pahor quickly expressed his preference for a snap election. On 14th April he set the date of the next election for 3rd June, when 1.7 million Slovenians will vote, to appoint the 90 members of the Drzavni Zbor. The electoral campaign officially started on 3rd May last.

According to the most recent poll by Mediana for POP TV, the Democratic Party (SDS) of former head of government (2004-2008 and, 2012-2013) Janez Jansa, is due to win the election with 13.5% of the vote, followed closely by the Marjan Sarec List (LMS), which is due to win 13.3% of the vote. The Social Democrats (SD) led by Dejan Zidan is due to come third with 8.5% of the vote and the Modern Centre Party (SMC) of outgoing Prime Minister Miro Cerar is due to win 4.1% of the vote, i.e. just above the 4% threshold that allows representatives to sit in the National Assembly.

### Did Miro Cerar do the right thing?

"With his resignation Miro Cerar took the Modern Centre Party out of government and therefore distanced his party from the negative opinion generally attached to participation in government," declared political analyst, Zorko Andraz of the pollster Valicon. The outgoing Prime Minister's resignation has therefore been timely and has allowed Miro Cerar to approach the next election as a

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victim in a better position than he would ordinarily have been if his party had continued in government.

Miro Cerar likes to qualify the Modern Centre Party as a “social-liberal centre left movement”. However, the latter has never really ever had any clear political, which incidentally creates a great deal of internal tension.

Miro Cerar is using his results as the head of the country as his support in this electoral campaign. He maintains that during his term in office he has succeeded in overcoming the economic crisis. Last year Slovenia registered GDP growth of 4%, i.e. one of the highest in the European Union. Growth is due to remain approximately at its present level in 2018 according to economic forecasts. Likewise, for the first time since the country’s independence in 1991 revenues have been higher than spending: + 0.03% in 2017. Finally, unemployment which totals 6.4% is also the lowest rate ever recorded since 2009.

Over the last few months Miro Cerar’s government has however had to face many protest movements (strikes, demonstrations asking for wage increases), notably in the civil service. The outgoing Prime Minister deems that he needs another term in office as head of State to complete the work he has started.

The Modern Centre Party is presenting 87 candidates in the general elections.

### **Will the Slovenians again give their vote to a newcomer on the political stage?**

Marjan Sarec, an unfortunate candidate in the presidential election (22nd October-12th November 2017) (46.91% in the 2nd round) in which he stood as an independent, is running for the post of Prime Minister. Leader of the Marjan Sarec List (LMS), a party he created in May 2014, whose ideology still has to be defined, Marjan Sarec maintains that “Slovenia is on its knees” and that he is the only one to be able to save it. Just as the mistrust of political leaders increases daily and in a country that is used to granting its trust to newcomers on the political stage in the general

elections (Zoran Jankovic in 2011, Miro Cerar in 2014), Marjan Sarec thinks that he has a chance.

According to a recent poll around half of the voters who say that they support the Marjan Sarec List come from the Modern Centre Party, 10% are from the Democratic Party (SDS) and 6% from the Social Democrats (SD).

The Mayor of Kamnik, a town of 29,000 inhabitants in the north of the country, and former actor (he created a rural character called Ivan Serpentinsek) and imitation artist (notably of the former President of the Republic (2002-2007) Janez Drnovsek), was firstly a member of Positive Slovenia (PS), a liberal left party, founded by Zoran Jankovic in 2011, before founding his own party in May 2014, in view of the local elections organised in the autumn of the same year, when he was re-elected for a second term as head of his town, winning 14 of the 29 seats on the town council.

The Marjan Sarec List held a convention on 14th April last in Medvode, a town near Ljubljana. The party’s programme includes a reform of the electoral system. The party wants to abolish the constituencies and introduce the preferential vote so that voters can opt for candidates rather than for parties, increase the number of constituencies, do away with the Drzavni Svet (National Council), the upper house of parliament, allow the President of the Republic to place his veto on laws approved by parliament and for the Prime Minister to appoint his ministers and to replace the latter without the need for parliament’s agreement.

Marjan Sarec is also promising to introduce a better healthcare system, to counter corruption more decisively, to ensure financial stability, to make the civil service more efficient, to develop tourism and to make Slovenia one of the European Union’s most important countries.

“One person, one community, one country”, this is the motto chosen by the Marjan Sarec List, whose programme bears the title: “Now is the time to make way for a new generation.” It is putting 77 candidates forward, most of whom have no electoral experience. Marjan Sarec likes to repeat that he has no majority

in his town of Kamnik, and that he learnt to govern in coalition using other parties as his support. The newcomer does not have any strong political base and the decision made by outgoing Prime Minister Miro Cerar to resign just weeks before the date planned for the general election, in a bid to appear like the other parties, might ultimately damage Marjan Sarec's electoral hopes.

### And what of the members of the outgoing government coalition

The Social Democrats (SD) decided to focus their electoral campaign on inequality. Led by the Minister for Agriculture, Forestry and Nutrition and the Vice President of the outgoing government Dejan Zidan, the party is putting 500 measures forward to make Slovenia one of the top ten European countries in terms of quality of life, sustainable development, innovation and economic and social performance within the next eight years. Its programme entitled Confident Slovenia 2018-2026, promises to strengthen the middle classes and therefore counter inequality. The development of an efficient healthcare system is also a priority for the Social Democrats.

Slovenia has a great number of parties positioned on the left of the political scale. Some Social Democratic supporters, undoubtedly disappointed by the party's work in the outgoing government, have turned towards more radical parties. Over the last few months, as the elections have approached, the Social Democrats have made a slight turn to the left.

The Democratic Party of Pensioners (DeSUS) led by outgoing Foreign Affairs Minister Karl Erjavec lies centre-left on the political scale, but it has however taken part in the governments that have been in office since 1997. The party defends the right for each pensioner, who has worked for 40 years, to receive a pension of at least 1,000€.

The Democratic Party of Pensioners achieved its highest score in the general elections on 13th July 2014 with 10.18% of the vote and 10 seats. 7 of the outgoing MPs are running for re-election on 3rd June.

### On the right the Democratic Party is vying for first place

The Democratic Party (SDS), a liberal movement led by former head of government (2004-2008 and 2012-2013) Janez Jansa, has dominated the Slovenian right for a long time. The party believes that the previous general elections on 13th July 2014, in which it was the favourite for a long time, were stolen from it. Indeed, one year before the election on 5th June 2013, its leader Janez Jansa was sentenced to two years in prison for corruption<sup>[1]</sup>, a conviction that was confirmed by the High Court on 28th April 2014.

The party, which is the only one to have undertaken a four-year term (2004-2008) at the head of Slovenia with the same government coalition, has a large local network. It is running to be the country's leading party. It defends the family and what it calls "positive patriotism", comprising in the main opposition to hosting refugees from the Middle East (notably from Syria and Iraq) or from Africa (Ethiopia, Sudan and Libya) in Slovenia.

"The result of the general election will depend more on the ability of the parties to mobilise voters who are convinced, rather than their ability to convince the voters. When we speak to them of migrants, the Democratic Party plays softly, since most Slovenians are against migrants and sceptical about their integration," declared Alem Maksuti, a political analyst at the Institute for Political Management. The established parties, and notably the Democratic Party might also turn the conflict between Marjan Sarec and Miro Cerar to their advantage. The latter has already indicated that his party will not take part in a coalition with the Democratic Party.

### The Slovenian Political System

Slovenia has a bicameral parliament. The Drzavni Zbor (lower house, National Assembly) comprises 90 members, all elected for a 4-year period by proportional representation. The Constitution guarantees a seat to each of the Italian and Hungarian minorities. The Drzavni Svet (upper house, National Council) is elected

1. The former Prime Minister (2004-2008 and 2012-2013) was found guilty of having received around 900,000€ in bribes from Austrian business man Walter Wolf, in support of his party in 2006 (at the time he was head of government) during the purchase of 135 armoured vehicles by the Ministry of Defence for a total of 278 million € from the Finnish manufacturer Patria – 73% of which is owned by the Finnish State. This transaction, which was obligatory on Slovenia's entry into NATO in 2004, was the biggest military contract ever signed by Ljubljana.

for 5 years by indirect suffrage and comprises 40 members: 18 representatives of the professional and socio-economic sectors (4 for the employers, 4 for the employees, 4 for the farmers, SME's and independent workers and 6 for non-profit making organisations) and 22 members representing local interests. The role of the Državni Svet is consultative.

In the general elections Slovenia is divided into 88 constituencies. Candidate lists put forward by the parties have to win the support of three MPs, who are members of the party presenting the list and of 50 voters or the support of 100 voters in the constituency in which they are running to be allowed to stand in the Slovenian election. Finally, political parties have to put forward at least 35% of women to stand as candidates. Lists which only have three names must include at least one woman and one man.

In Slovenia the elections are proportional, and voting is preferential (the voter can show his preferences by ranking the candidates in the list).

The first distribution of seats is made on a constituency level using the Droop quota system (number of votes cast in the constituency, all lists together, divided by the number of MPs elected in the constituency +1). The remaining seats are divided nationally according to the d'Hondt method and MPs are then chosen from lists with the highest remainder.

The parties have to win at least 4% of the vote to be represented in the Državni Zbor. Sometimes a constituency will elect more than one MP but also some constituencies elect none, which was the case in the last general elections on 13th July 2014 in 21 of the 88 constituencies.

MPs representing the minorities are elected according to the "first past the post system". The candidates for this office have to be supported by at least 30 voters.

Each party is allowed to spend 0.40€ per voters, slightly more if it is presenting candidates in each of the 88 constituencies.

7 political parties are represented in the present National Assembly:

- the Modern Centre Party (SMC), of outgoing Prime Minister Miro Cerar created in 2014, has 36 seats;
- the Democratic Party (SDS), a liberal party created in 1989 and led by former Head of Government (2004-2008 and 2012-2013), Janez Jansa, has 21 seats;
- the Democratic Party of Pensioners (DeSUS), founded in 1991 based on an association of the town of Maribor and chaired since 2005 by outgoing Foreign Affairs Minister, Karl Erjavec. Member of the outgoing government coalition, it has 10 seats;
- the Social Democratic Party (SD), founded in 1993 based on the former Communist Party (PCS). Member of the outgoing government coalition and led by Minister of Agriculture and the Environment and Vice-President of the outgoing government, Dejan Zidan, the party has 6 MPs;
- United Left (ZL), a party created in 2014 and dissolved in 2017, a year in which it was replaced by the Left (Levica), led by a collective has 6 seats;
- New Slovenia (NSi), a party founded in 2000 and led since January 2018 by Matej Tonin has 5 seats;
- the Alenka Bratusek Alliance (ZaAB), a centrist party created in 2014 based on a split of Positive Slovenia (PS) and led by former Prime Minister (2013-2014) Alenka Bratusek, has 4 seats.

In Slovenia the president of the Republic is appointed by direct universal suffrage. His term in office is five years. On 12th November 2017, the outgoing head of State Borut Pahor (SD) was re-elected to office with 52.98% of the vote. He beat Marjan Sarec who won 47.02% of the vote. Turnout was the lowest ever recorded since the country's independence in 1991: 41.84%.

**Reminder of the general election results 13th July 2014 in Slovenia**

Turnout: 51.73%

Political Parties	Number of votes won	Percentage of votes won	Number of seats
Modern Centre Party (SMC)	301 563	34.49	36
Democratic Party (SDS)	181 052	20.71	21
Democratic Party of Pensioners (DeSUS)	88 968	10.18	10
Social Democrats (SD)	52 249	5.98	6
United Left (ZL)	52 189	5.97	6
New Slovenia (NSi)	48 846	5.59	5
Alenka Bratusek Alliance (ZaAB)	38 293	4.38	4
Others	111 131	12.70	0

Source : <http://volitve.gov.si/dz2014/en/index.html>

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