

The Democratic Party leads in voting intentions in Slovenia just one week before the general elections

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7 days before
the poll

On 4th December 1,376 people from 21 political parties are standing in the general election – the first in Slovenia’s history to take place early. Seven parties will be present in the country’s 11 constituencies including the Social Democratic Party (SD), led by outgoing Prime Minister Borut Pahor, and the main opposition party, the Democratic Party (SDS) led by Janez Jansa. Four recently founded parties are running, notably Positive Slovenia led by the Mayor of Ljubljana, Zoran Jankovic, and the Citizens’ List-Gregor Virant, founded by former Minister Gregor Virant (2004-2008).

These early elections are the result of the rejection by the Drzavni Zbor (National Assembly), the lower chamber of parliament of the confidence motion put forward by Borut Pahor’s government on 20th September.

The Social Democratic Party, in office for the last four years, is struggling in the polls. According to a recent survey published by the newspaper, *Delo*, nearly three quarters of Slovenians (72.5%) consider the government’s work in a negative light. Outgoing Prime Minister Borut Pahor, formed a government with three other parties after the previous general elections on 21st September 2008: Zares (Z), the Liberal Democratic Party (LDS) and the Democratic Pensioners’ Party (DeSUS). In May of this year, DeSUS chose to quit office in demonstration of its disapproval of the postponement of the legal age of retirement that was requested by the Prime Minister; by doing this Borut Pahor was deprived of his parliamentary majority in the Drzavni Zbor. In June, Zares also quit government after the failure of the referendum on 5th June on the extension of working time (the increase of the legal full retirement age to 65) and changes to pensions funding. Nearly three quarters of Slovenians (72.05%) voted against the question (turnout lay at 40.46%). Finally 6 LDS ministers quit the government after the departure of the Interior Minister Katarina Kresal, was forced

to resign after her indictment for corruption. Borut Pahor is accused of delaying the dismissal of the Interior Minister, although he had been informed of the irregular nature of the situation by the National Bureau of Investigation. He protested saying that he had preferred to trust Katarina Kresal.

The outgoing government’s economic results are mediocre. Slovenia has been badly affected by the international economic crisis, notably due to its dependency on foreign capital and exports. The country experienced a recession of 7.8% in 2009. This year, growth is due to rise just above 1%. The country’s debt rose from 22.5% to 43.3% of the GDP in two years (2008-2010), unemployment has more than doubled (12% of the working population is unemployed). In 2010 the government coalition introduced austerity measures to bring the country back on track and to stimulate economic growth.

The Democratic Party, as well as the Slovenian National Party (SNS), led by Zmago Jelincic with the support of the other political parties, caused the failure of the vote on the austerity plan which targeted a 10% reduction in civil servants’ salaries. “A *slap in*

the government's face was more important to them than reviving the country's growth," commented outgoing Prime Minister Borut Pahor. Although the parliament was dissolved on 21st October last, it was able to convene however on the request of at least 2/3 of the MPs.

The opposition leader qualified the election on 4th December "as being the most important one in the country's history." *"Not only is your vote decisive with regard to the way the Slovenians will live for the next four years but it will affect the way future generations will live also,"* he declared on 19th November last.

The SDS is putting forward 88 candidates, 32 of whom are women. It is also supporting four candidates from Avion, a movement created by the Mayor of Koper, Boris Popovic. Its programme, entitled *10 + 100 solutions for equity, jobs and development*, hopes to limit public spending to 45% of the GDP, facilitate the grant of loans and make national banks more responsible. It wants to reduce business profit tax to 15%, reduce taxes on investments and on innovation revenues. It is promising to reduce unemployment and achieve an employment rate of 75% by 2020. It is suggesting the reduction of labour costs to encourage the creation of jobs, notably that of the eldest and the long term unemployed and to develop life-long training programmes.

Aware that Slovenia needs to undertake major reforms but that these will be painful for the population, Janez Jansa is insisting on the need for his party to win the 2/3 majority in Parliament on 4th December. *"We need a 2/3 majority because the reforms cannot be approved without that and we know that some of them will not be very popular,"* he declared. Janez Jansa said that it *"would be difficult to avoid budgetary cuts in 2012,"* but that the SDS *"would share out the burden in a fair, equitable way between all Slovenians."*

Finally the SDS hopes to modify the Constitution in order to shorten the appointment procedure of all governments. At present this lasts between 2 to 3 months, and it is due to be reduced to two weeks.

Milan Kucan, former President of the Republic (1992-2002) and a sympathiser of Positive Slovenia, says that Borut Pahor and Janez Jansa have both lost

the confidence of the Slovenians and have failed to convince them of the need for reform. Several members of the Social Democratic Party have also joined Positive Slovenia, including MP Melita Zupevc.

Zoran Jankovic, the leader of Positive Slovenia and Mayor of Ljubljana found himself at the heart of a polemic involving his two sons, who have been accused of investing money in tax havens. He will have a choice to make after the elections because since May of this year the electoral law stipulates that an MP cannot hold the post of mayor as well.

The Citizens List-Gregor Virant is putting 80 candidates forward, 37 of whom are women. Its programme is focused on the stimulation of economic development and the reduction of public deficit. It wants to reform the tax system to foster employment (for example by reducing taxation on small entrepreneurs), lighten the burden weighing on the middle classes and to reduce the number of the country's state institutions. It has however been losing ground in the polls since it was revealed that its leader had received 66,175 € in unemployment benefits at a time when he was declaring 95,252 € in income.

Janez Jansa has "accused" Zoran Jankovic and Gregor Virant of representing the interests of the wealthiest Slovenians only. When asked about a possible alliance with Positive Slovenia or the Citizens List-Gregor Virant, the opposition leader said that Slovenia needs as "united a government" as possible. All of the political leaders are avoiding talk of post-electoral alliances and are not saying with which other parties they might join forces to form a government. The leftwing party, Zares, hopes to reduce the number of civil servants by 2%, by freezing recruitment, and in this way the country will save 100 million € per year. It indicates that the simplification of the administrative system would help Ljubljana save 300 million € and lead to a 10% reduction in public spending i.e. 250 million €. Its leader Gregor Golobic says that it was impossible to ask more of workers, who were already heavily taxed.

The People's Party (SLS), Slovenia's oldest party (founded in 1988), also wants to reduce business profit tax (notably that weighing on the smallest companies), to reduce the number of administrations and establish fairer redistribution of wealth.

Finally the National Party which is presenting 65 candidates is campaigning under the banner "*Let's Clean up Slovenia*". It is asking for a reduction profit tax and VAT, which it would like to set at 20% and 15% respectively. The nationalist leader, Zmago Jelincic says he is confident that his party will rise above the 4% vote mark, which is essential if it wants to be represented in the Drzavni Zbor.

According to the latest poll by Valicon which was published in the daily Zurnal 24, the Democratic Party is due to win 28% of the vote on 4th December next. It should then be followed by Positive Slovenia led by Zoran Jankovic, 21%, the Citizens List-Gregor Virant 13%, the Democratic Pensioners' Party (DeSUS) 9%,

the Social Democratic Party 8% ; the People's Party 6% and the New Slovenia-People's Christian Party, (NSi-KLS) 4%.

When interviewed about the qualities of the main candidates on the list one quarter of Slovenians (25%) believe that Gregor Virant is the most social of them (23% quote Janez Jansa and Zoran Jankovic). The latter is preferred for the post of Prime Minister by nearly half of those interviewed (45%), 22% speak in support of Janez Jansa and 13% Gregor Virant. Finally the leader of the Democratic Party is believed to be the best candidate to represent Slovenia in the world (34%), 29% preferred Zoran Jankovic and 17%, Gregor Virant.

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