

# The opposition (right) led by Igor Matovic wins the legislative elections in Slovakia

The Party of Ordinary People and Independent Personalities (OL'aNO), a right-wing party led by Igor Matovic, allied to New Majority (Nova), led by Gabor Grendel, won the parliamentary elections held on 29th February in Slovakia. The party won 25.02% of the vote and took 53 of the 150 seats in the National Council of the Republic (Narodna rada Slovenskej republiky), the only chamber of Parliament, which is 34 more seats than in the previous parliamentary elections held on 5 March 2016.

Direction-Social Democracy (SMER-SD), the party of outgoing Prime Minister Peter Pellegrini, led by Robert Fico, was thus defeated, obtaining only 18.29% of the vote and 38 seats (-11). We are a family (Sme Rodina), a right-wing populist party led by Boris Kollar, surprised everyone by coming third with 8.24% of the vote and 17 seats (+6), while the People's Party Our Slovakia (LSNS) took 7.97% of the vote and 17 seats (+3). The far-right nationalist party, led by Marian Kotleba, scored below the forecasts made in the last opinion polls (these are banned in Slovakia during the last two weeks of the election campaign). Freedom and Solidarity (Sloboda a Solidarita, SaS), a liberal

party led by Richard Sulik, came fifth with 6.22% and 13 seats (-8). Finally, For the People (Za Ludi), a party created in 2019 by former President Andrej Kiska (2014-2019), entered parliament with 5.77% and 12 seats.

Michal Truban's Progressive Slovakia (SP), allied with Together-Civil Democracy (Spolu) led by Miroslav Beblavy, failed to win elected representatives by 1,000 votes. The party received 6.96% of the votes. Similarly, for the first time in Slovakia's history, no party representing the Hungarian community will have a seat in parliament. Bela Bugar, leader of Most-Hid («Bridge»), a partner of Direction-Social Democracy in the outgoing government, announced his resignation when the results were announced. Robert Fico's other ally in the governing coalition, the National Party (SNS), a right-wing nationalist, populist party led by Andrej Danko, suffered the same fate and also failed to make it into parliament.

Turnout was the highest since the 2002 legislative elections. It stood at 65.8%, well above the 5.98-point increase recorded in the previous parliamentary elections of 5 March 2016.

## General Elections in Slovakia

29<sup>th</sup> February 2020

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### General Election Results of 29 February 2020 in Slovakia

Turnout: 65.8%

Political parties	Number of votes won	% of votes won	No. of seats
The party of ordinary people and independent personalities (OL'aNO)	721 166	25,02	53
Direction-Social Democracy (SMER-SD)	527 172	18,29	38
We are a family (Sme Rodina)	257 531	8,24	17
People's Party-Our Slovakia (LSNS)	229 660	7,97	17
Progressive Slovakia/Together-Civic Democracy (SP/Spolu)	200 780	6,96	0
Freedom and Solidarity (SaS)	179 246	6,22	13
For the people (Za Ludi)	166 325	5,77	12
Christian Democratic Movement (KDH)	134 099	4,65	0
Hungarian Coalition Party (SMK-MKP)	112 662	3,90	0
National Party (SNS)	91 171	3,16	0
Others	297 028	9,80	0

Source : Site internet <https://volbysr.sk/sk/data02.html>

«We see this result as a demand from the people who want us to bring order to Slovakia, to make it a fair country, where the law applies to everyone, rich or poor,» said Igor Matovic on the announcement of the results, adding «We have woken the sleeping dragon, more than 2 million people who do not usually go to vote. But the deaths of Jan Kuciak and Martina Kusnirova woke Slovakia up». Igor Matovic indicated that he wanted to govern with Freedom and Solidarity and For the People. He regretted not being able to call on Progressive Slovakia/Civil Democracy (SP/Spolu) and will probably have to turn to We are a family to get a stable majority in parliament.

«Igor Matovic attracted voters from Progressive Slovakia with his authenticity,» maintained Martin Slosiarik, manager of the pollster Focus. «The break-up of the opposition has risen to a degree not seen since 1989. It has been hard for the liberal parties to really distinguish themselves. Progressive Slovakia, the party of Zuzana Caputova, the President of the Republic elected last year and who was involved in the demonstrations (following the assassinations of Jan Kuciak and Martina Kusnirova), has not managed

to establish itself as the champion of the protest. It has become one party among others», declared Jana Vargovcikova, a political scientist from the University of Lorraine.

Outgoing Prime Minister Peter Pellegrini (SMER-SD) acknowledged his party's defeat but also raised the possibility of a «reconciliation coalition» with the Party of Ordinary People and Independent Personalities. «No way. We are not negotiating with the mafia,» Igor Matovic replied.

However, it remains unclear what policy Ol'aNO will pursue in Slovakia. For Michal Vasecka, a sociologist at the Political Institute in Bratislava, the party is a «chameleon». Its lists indeed comprise a variety of personalities to whom Igor Matovic likes to leave a great deal of freedom. Matovic is committed to cleaning up political life and has run an original campaign under the slogan «Together, let's beat the mafia». «I will do everything in my power to show that we are responsible, guarantors of stability and to ensure that the mafia, which will be on the lookout for our slip-ups, can never return to power,» he said.

Social Democracy-Directorate suffered its first defeat in legislative elections in fourteen years. «*These legislative elections reflect above all the aspiration for decency in politics. Instead of demonstrating in the streets against the ruling party, people will demonstrate in the polling stations,*» predicted political analyst Radoslav Stefancik. Robert Fico has vowed that his party will soon return to power. He is betting on the fragility of a governing coalition comprising parties opposed to the outgoing government. Political analysts, however, do not share his view on a possible return of Direction-Social Democracy. «*The party has lost all the elections held in the last four years: regional, municipal and presidential,*» said Erik Lastic, a political scientist from the Comenius University in Bratislava,

The elections came just days after the second anniversary of the murder of journalist Jan Kuciak and his fiancée Martina Kusnirova, both aged 27, on 21 February 2018. Kuciak was investigating on behalf of the website *aktuality.sk*, the website of the country's leading daily *Novy cas*, the suspected fraud of European subsidies organised by the Italian mafia in Slovakia which had been aided by government officials. This double murder led several tens of thousands of Slovaks to take to the streets, the largest demonstration since the Velvet Revolution of 1989, and also led then Prime Minister Robert Fico, two of his ministers and the head of the Slovak police force to resign in March 2018.

On 27 February, the day before the election, businessman Marian Kocner, arrested and imprisoned since October 2018 for having ordered this double

murder, was sentenced together with former Economy Minister (2003-2006) Pavol Rusko to 19 years' imprisonment in another case: he was found guilty of counterfeiting, altering and illegally manufacturing money and securities to the tune of €69 million.

The assassinations of Jan Kuciak and Martina Kusnirova brought to light Marian Kocner's links with the leaders of Direction-Social Democracy. «*The Slovaks want change and above all action against corruption. The party that led the outgoing government is perceived as being responsible for corruption,*» said Grigorij Meseznikov of the Institute of Public Affairs in Bratislava. «*The assassination of Jan Kuciak shook the entire political scene and led to the emergence of new liberal and democratic parties that immediately gained popular support,*» he added.

46-year-old Igor Matovic, a native of Travna, studied financial management at Comenius University. He founded a publishing house that controls dozens of regional newspapers. He was elected MP in 2010 on the Freedom and Solidarity (SaS) lists while he was at the end of the list, in 150th place. The preferential voting system nevertheless allowed him to enter parliament. He then made this place his trademark and his good luck charm. He therefore occupies it in every vote. In February 2011, Igor Matovic left Liberty and Solidarity and created the Party of Ordinary People and Independent Personalities (Ol'aNO) when he decided to support the restrictions proposed by Direction-Social Democracy regarding dual nationality.