

## Robert Fico's Direction-Social Democracy (Smer-SD) leads the general elections in Slovakia

As forecast by the opinion polls, but by a larger margin than expected, Direction-Social Democracy (SMER-SD), the social democratic party led by former prime minister (2006-2010 and 2012-2018) Robert Fico, came out ahead in the 30 September general elections in Slovakia with 22.94% of the vote and 42 of the 150 seats in the National Council of the Republic (Narodna rada Slovenskej republiky), the single chamber of parliament (up 4 on the previous general elections of 29 February 2020). Progressive Slovakia (PS), a social-liberal and pro-European party led by Michal Simecka, came 2nd with 17.96% of the vote and 32 seats (it was not represented in the outgoing parliament). 5 other parties won seats. Hlas, (Voice in Slovak), created in 2020 by former Prime Minister (2018-2020) Peter Pellegrini after his secession from SMER-SD, won 14.7% and 27 seats (this is this party's first participation in general elections); the Party of Ordinary People and Independent Personalities (OL'aNO), led by former Prime Minister (2021-2022) Igor Matovic, won 8.89% and 16 seats (-37); Jan Figel's Christian Democratic Movement (KDH) won 6.82% and 12 seats, returning it to Parliament; Freedom and Solidarity (Sloboda a Solidarita, SaS), a liberal party led by Richard Sulik, won 6.32% and 11 seats (-2); and the National Party

(SNS), a nationalist and populist party led by Andrej Danko, will return to Parliament after winning 5.62% and 10 seats.

These elections were called a year early. On 23 January, the government together with Freedom and Solidarity had agreed to revise the Constitution to allow Parliament to call early general elections. Prime Minister Eduard Heger (Democrats, D) left office on 7 May after the resignation of two ministers, Samuel Vican, responsible for Agriculture and Rural Development, and Ratislav Kacer, Minister of Foreign Affairs. He was replaced by Ludovit Odor, Vice-President of the National Bank, at the head of a caretaker government, appointed by the President of the Republic, Zuzana Caputova, to manage current affairs until the elections on 30 September.

58,779 Slovaks living abroad fulfilled their civic duty. 61.7% voted in favour of Progressive Slovakia. Freedom and Solidarity came 2nd with 10.8%. Direction-Social Democracy came 3rd with 6.1%.

Turnout was higher than in the previous election on 29 February 2020, at 68.42% (+2.62 points).

## General elections in Slovakia

30th September 2023

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### Results of the general elections in Slovakia on 30 September 2023

Turnout: 68.42%

Political Parties	Number of votes obtained	Percentage of votes received	Number of Seats
<b>Direction-Social Democracy (SMER-SD)</b>	681 017	22.94	42
<b>Progressive Slovakia (PS)</b>	533 136	17.96	32
<b>Hlas (Voice)</b>	436 415	14.70	27
<b>Party of ordinary people and independent personalities-NOVA (OL'aNO-NOVA)</b>	264 137	8.89	16
<b>Christian-Democratic Movement (KDH)</b>	202 515	6.82	12
<b>Freedom and Solidarity (SaS)</b>	187 645	6.32	11
<b>National Party (SNS)</b>	166 995	5.62	10
<b>Others</b>	496 033	16.72	0

Source : <https://elections.public.lu/fr/elections-legislatives/2018.html>

The President of the Republic, Zuzana Caputova, declared that she would entrust the formation of the government to the leader of the party that came out ahead in the elections. Robert Fico should therefore be called upon to form the next government. Political analysts agree that a coalition comprising the SMER-SD, Hlas and SNS parties is highly likely to emerge. Robert Fico has governed twice with the nationalist party, from 2006 to 2010 and from 2016 to 2018. He might however choose to seek support from the Christian Democratic Movement.

*"The return of SMER-SD to government is one of the most likely options. Even Progressive Slovakia's good result in the polls highlights the huge disappointment with the outgoing government. The only party still attracting the urban and liberal vote is this extra-general party. The people who took part in the government coalition have lost all credibility,"* declared Jana Vargovcikova, lecturer in political science at the "Institut national des langues et civilisations orientales" (INALCO), ahead of the vote, adding, *"For Robert Fico, regaining power is a personal issue. These general elections are not just about politics, but also about his personal future."* *"Robert Fico is a technician of power, by far the best in Slovakia. So far, he has no rivals,"* stressed Michal Vasecka of the think tank Bratislava Policy Institute de Bratislava. *"Voters face a fairly clear-cut choice. On the one hand, with Michal Simecka, we have the advocates of a pro-Western orientation who claim that the functioning of the State*

*conforms to the standards of the European Union in terms of the rule of law and the quality of democracy. On the other side, with Robert Fico, we see a much more ambiguous, even openly pro-Russian, anti-American, anti-Western, anti-NATO and anti-European Union orientation, with a view of democracy closer to the ideological discourse of the governments in power in Hungary and Poland,"* analysed Lukas Macek, director of the Sciences Po campus in Dijon, on the eve of the vote.

During the election campaign, Robert Fico promised that his first action would be to cut military aid to Ukraine. Bratislava is one of Kyiv's biggest supporters, welcoming refugees and providing a fleet of fighter aircraft, including 13 MiG-29s and an anti-aircraft defence system. *"Let's help if we can, but Slovakia's interests come first,"* repeated the leader of SMER-SD who was quick to declare that *"the war in Ukraine began in 2014 when Ukrainian fascists killed civilian victims of Russian nationality"* or claiming that NATO had attacked Moscow more than the latter had attacked Kyiv. Robert Fico attracted voters with his anti-European rhetoric, condemning the decision to impose sanctions on Russia. The dissatisfaction with SMER-SD 3 years ago was forgotten and Robert Fico succeeded in stirring up anger against the outgoing government.

*"It is difficult to predict how Robert Fico will behave. Should we base ourselves on his current political position*

*or rather on the continuity of his political career and what he has done in the past? (...) We can now see a form of radicalisation in him. Compared to the Robert Fico of yesterday, the Robert Fico of today is clearly elsewhere, politically, ideologically and on a human level,"* declared Lukas Macek. *"If he wins, we will be heading for a government with a very different vision of the rule of law and democracy, a combination of what we have in Poland and Hungary,"* indicated Michal Vasecka. *"There's the election rhetoric and then there's what government responsibility will dictate. Obviously, they are less 'Ukrainophile' and less committed than the outgoing government, but at the same time, there has been no questioning of the issue of reception and humanitarian aid. The issue in question is the supply of arms,"* suggests Etienne Boisserie Professor of Central European History at INALCO. *"The West's task is to ensure that Slovakia is not lost and to commit to constructive dialogue with Robert Fico, but Moscow welcomes what are perceived as cracks in the eastern part of Europe and the fact that Hungary is no longer alone,"* maintains Milan Nic of the German Council for External Relations.

Robert Fico, 59, comes from Topolcany in the west of the country. He graduated in law from Comenius University and from the Institute of State and Law of the Academy of Sciences in Bratislava. He began his professional career at the Law Institute of the Ministry of Justice before being appointed Slovakia's representative to the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg in 1994, a post he held for 6 years. A member of the Communist Party from 1987, then of the Party of the Democratic Left

(SDL), he was elected Member of Parliament in 1992. He left his party after the general elections in September 1998, upset at not having won a ministerial post. In December 1999, he founded Direction (SMER). Robert Fico was appointed Prime Minister after his party won the general elections on 17 June 2006. He came first in the legislative elections on 12 June 2010, but was unable to propose a coherent policy or rally support for his party and failed to form a government. He regained the post of Prime Minister on 10 March 2012 following a snap general election. In March 2014, he failed in the presidential election, losing by a wide margin to Andrej Kiska in the 2nd round of voting (59.38% of the vote). However, he won the general elections on 5 March 2016 and formed a new government coalition.

The murder on 21 February 2018 of journalist Jan Kuciak (and his fiancée Martina Kusnirova, both aged 27), who was investigating for *aktuality.sk*, the website of the country's leading daily *Novy cas*, on suspected fraud involving European subsidies organised by the Italian mafia in Slovakia with the help of people close to the government, brought tens of thousands of Slovaks onto the streets, the largest mobilisation since the Velvet Revolution of 1989, and ultimately led to the resignation of Robert Fico, 2 ministers and the head of the police. SMER-SD was then defeated at the polls on 29 February 2020.

Seven and a half years after being forced to resign, Robert Fico won his 5th general election on 30 September. During his campaign, he promised "stability, order and well-being" to his fellow countrymen. Will he succeed, and with what coalition?

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