

The leftwing opposition running favourite in the early general elections in Slovakia

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ANALYSIS
1 month before
the poll

The Slovaks are being called to ballot on 10th March next in early general elections after the vote of no-confidence in the National Council, the only chamber of Parliament, on 11th October last against Prime Minister Iveta Radicova's government (Democratic and Christian Union and Democratic Party, SDKU-DS). This is the third time that general elections will take place early (after those of 1994 and 2006) in the country since independence in 1993.

2,971 candidates have been registered on 26 lists, including 15 which presented 150 people (numbers of MPs) (+8 in comparison with the last election on 12th June 2010). Since 2004 Slovaks living abroad have been able to take part in the general elections. In 2010 only 5,861 of them voted.

The leftwing opposition, represented by Direction-Social Democracy (SMER-SD) led by former Prime Minister (2006-2010), Robert Fico, is the main favourite in this election.

The political crisis

On 11th October last the National Council voted 124 against, (55 in favour and 60 abstentions) the adoption of the European Financial Stability Facility (EFSF) approved by the 27 European Union Members of State and Government on 9th May 2010, which is designed to protect the Union's financial stability by providing financial assistance to the States in the euro zone which find themselves in economic difficulty. Prime Minister Iveta Radicova associated the ratification of the European text with a confidence vote in her government. This strategy failed since MPs preferred to say "no" to the government in office – which rallies the SDKU-DS, Most-Hid, Freedom and Solidarity (SaS) and the Christian Democratic Movement (KDH) – to the detriment of the EFSF, about which Slovakia was the last EU Member States to express its opinion. The MPs in the main opposition party (SMER-SD) and all of the representatives of Liberty and Solidarity (except for one) voted against.

"The 2 in 1 vote was a desperate last chance because the government parties had been negotiating intensely since May but compromise solutions which would have enabled Freedom and Solidarity to save face had

been rejected over the last three weeks," declared Marek Rybar, a political analyst at the Comenius University. The SDKU-DS leader, Mikulas Dzurinda offered a compromise to the SaS leader, Richard Sulik, offering the government coalition's support to the appointment of Kamil Krnac, the SaS candidate, for the leadership of the National Security Bureau (NBU) and the upkeep of its ministers in government in exchange for his party's support to the EFSF. But it was all to naught. Richard Sulik criticised the linking of the confidence vote to the European text, which he qualified as "blackmail", on the part of Prime Minister Radicova. The SaS highlighted the fact that Slovakia, the second poorest country in the euro zone, was unable to lend money to States in debt or to pay for the recapitalisation of the banks.

On 14th October the EFSF was adopted in a second vote 114 votes in favour, 30 against and 3 abstentions. Robert Fico (SMER-SD) voted in support of the European mechanism this time round. *"No' to Iveta Radicova's government but 'yes' to the EFSF,"* he declared. The day before, Parliament approved a constitutional law enabling the organisation of early general elections on 10th March 2012.

The Slovakian Political System

The National Council (Narodna rada Slovenskej republiky) comprises 150 members elected for 4 years by proportional election from blocked lists in one single national constituency. In order to stand in the elections every party or movement has to pay a deposit of 16,596€, which is returned if its rallies at least 10,000 members. If the party has less members than this it can however deliver a support petition bearing the number of signatures that enable it attain this figure. The parties which won more than 3% of the vote in the previous general election have the right to a State subsidy. Every party has to win at least 5% of the vote cast to be represented in parliament – a coalition of 2 to 3 parties has to win at least 7% (10% if it includes 4 parties and more). Candidates have to be at least 21 years old and live permanently in Slovakia.

6 political parties are represented in the present National Council of the Republic:

- Direction-Social Democracy (SMER-SD), created on 29th October 1999 and led by former Prime Minister, (2006-2010), Robert Fico, has 68 seats;
- the Democratic and Christian Union-Democratic Party (SDKU-DS) led by outgoing Prime Minister Iveta Radicova, which merged with the Democratic Party on 21st January 2006, has 28 seats;
- Freedom and Solidarity (Sloboda a Solidarita, SaS), created in 2008 by its present leader, economist and father of the single tax in Slovakia, Richard Sulik, has 22 seats;
- the Christian Democratic Movement (KDH) created in February 1990 and led by Jan Figel, with 15 seats;
- Most-Hid (which means “bridge”), founded on 30th June 2009 by its present leader Bela Burgar with 14 seats;
- the National Party (SNS), a populist movement created in December 1989 and led by Jan Slota, with 9 MPs.

Direction-Social Democracy, running favourite in the election.

Direction-Social Democracy (SMER-SD) has been Slovakia’s leading party for a number of years. Its leader, Robert Fico, likes to mock the other parties who are obli-

ged to campaign and to “sell themselves like brands”, something, in his opinion, the SMER-SD does not need to do. Indeed the party has been campaigning since the general elections on 12th June 2010.

In October last after the collapse of Ms Radicova’s government, Robert Fico indicated that the SMER-SD would remain on the opposition benches until the last day of the mandate and that it would not try to strengthen its position in parliament. SMER-SD openly used the vote on the EFSF to bring the government down, before accepting the text after achieving the organisation of early general elections. During the campaign Robert Fico will however be obliged to explain his action to some of his sympathisers with regard to the EFSF.

SMER-SD stands as the defender of Slovakian living standards and buying power and repeats that the rise in prices, which has been the highest in the European Union, represents the failure of Ms Radicova’s government, whom it also accuses of having caused a rise in unemployment and the deterioration of the country’s living conditions. The party wants energy and food prices to be State controlled and is planning to tax the wealthy and businesses more. In its opinion voters will have to choose “*between chaos and a strong, stable government.*” According to some polls SMER-SD may win the absolute majority in parliament, i.e. 76 seats. Robert Fico says however that if he wins, he will form a coalition with another party, without saying which one it will be.

The President of the Republic Ivan Gasparovic said that he was certain SMER-SD was going to win on 10th March. “*Voters should know that we need a stable government which will guarantee the reforms and Slovakia’s position in the European Union, the foreign policy and the country’s economy,*” stressed the Head of State.

The outgoing government coalition

The Democratic and Christian Union-Democratic Party’s programme entitled “Four wheel drive elections” “For a difficult terrain, the four wheel drive is the best vehicle” says the SDKU-DS, which is relying on its experience. The party is promising to reduce public spending but is against increasing taxes. It hopes to simplify the tax system and keep the single rate on VAT, income tax and company tax – commonly called the “flat tax” presently set at 19%.

Ivan Miklos, the outgoing Finance Minister and the SDKU-DS's parliamentary leader, said that rising unemployment was the country's main problem. He deplores the fact that he was unable to implement a programme in support of employment which he drew up with Jozef Mihal (SaS), Employment, Social Affairs and Family Minister. He maintains that the State should guarantee a training session, offered by the public institutions; young graduates might also be able to retrain if they cannot find work within the six months following their graduation. Moreover he indicated that the budgetary deficit was due to lie at 4.9% of the GDP in 2011 (it lay at 8% in 2010) and that it may decrease to 3.5% this year and then to 1% in 2013.

Mikulas Dzurinda, the SDKU-DS leader, outgoing Foreign Minister and former Prime Minister (1998-2006) thinks that Europe will emerge strengthened from the present socio-economic crisis and hopes for greater stability in the euro zone.

"It is impossible to make a true assessment of the measures taken by Ms Radicova's government this year," stresses Lazlo Ollos, a political analyst – *"it has approved some reforms, which it has been impossible to finalise and about which we cannot really have a debate,"* he added. *"The government could not continue with the fundamental differences that existed between its various members,"* declared Grigorij Meseznikov, chairman of the think tank the Public Affairs Institute, adding, *"relations with Freedom and Solidarity has worsened to the point that Prime Minister Radicova could not continue cooperation with this party, which refused to support her on this issue of utmost importance."*

The SDKU-DS has been rocked over the last few weeks by the "Gorilla" affair, the name of an operation undertaken by the Slovakian information services, which blew up in December last after the publication on the internet of secret documents and conversation recordings. The latter reveal conversations between Jaroslav Hascak, chairman of the Penta financial group and several politicians between 2005 and 2006, which also contained information about how the main parties were funded. "Gorilla" reveals links between the political and business world. The SDKU-DS, in office in 2005-2006, was the first to fall victim to this, even though the other parties are also involved.

The SDKU-DS will be led by Mikulas Dzurinda. The Finance Minister Ivan Miklos and Justice Minister Lucia Zitnanska (SDKU-DU) will stand in 2nd and 3rd place. The outgoing head of government Ms Radicova announced that she was retiring from political life. Mikulas Dzurinda indicated that the SDKU-DS would not take part in a government coalition with the SMER-SD, but did not rule out governing again with the SaS. The party prefers however to focus on working with its present partners including the Christian-Democratic Movement (KDH) and Most-Hid.

Freedom and Solidarity (SaS) has suggested the organisation of a referendum on the functioning of the European Union and the euro zone on the same days as the general elections. The party wants to improve electoral participation and minimise the cost of this popular consultation. *"The EFSF is the greatest threat to Europe,"* declared Richard Sulik. The party will be making the European facility one of its major issues in these general elections. *"Slovakia has the lowest wages in the euro zone. How can I explain to people that we are going to raise VAT so that the Greeks can receive their pensions that are three times higher than those in Slovakia?"* repeat Richard Sulik.

The Christian Democratic leader Jan Figel, outgoing Transport Minister, defends the opposite position. In his opinion *"Slovakia should not remain isolated or decline into populism. The euro is the Slovakian currency, not just that of Europe,"* he declared. Jan Figel believes that victory by SMER-SD would be the worst thing that his country could suffer. *"In an election people can vote in support of SMER-SD's socialist policy that will lead to debt and the collapse of the country just as it is happening in Greece or they can choose the path of responsible freedom that we are putting forward that will lead to employment growth and economic prosperity,"* he said.

Most-Hid's programme plans for further public spending cuts to bring the deficit below the 4.9% of the GDP mark. The party has ruled out any participation in a government coalition led by SMER-SD. 8 of its 14 MPs have said that they are running as independents in the general elections.

The Other Parties

The National Party (SNS) is fighting against “*the Islamisation*” of Slovakia. “*I am not saying that one religion is worse than another or that another is better, I am talking about problems that come with the coexistence between Islam and the Roman Catholic Church,*” stresses Andrej Danko, the parliamentary leader of the SNS. He also hopes to organise a referendum on the country’s language. Slovakian has been the country’s only official language since a law was passed in July 2009. However communities, in which more than 20% of the population comprises a linguistic minority, can use another language. Acknowledged minority languages in Slovakia are Hungarian, Romany, Czech, Rusyn, Ukrainian, German, Croatian, Polish and Bulgarian.

The Hungarian Coalition Party (SMK) which is not represented in parliament right now hopes to win its seat back. “*Any result over 5% of the vote will be a success,*” indicates its leader Jozef Berenyi. He has focused its electoral campaign on four issues: work, education in a mother-tongue, the improvement of the healthcare system and an increase in retirement pensions.

2012 might be the year in which the long political career of Vladimir Meciar, former Prime Minister (1993-1994 and 1994-1998) comes to an end – indeed he announced his retirement from public life if his party, the Popular Party-Movement for a Democratic Slovakia (LS-HZDS) did not win the 5% of the vote necessary to be represented in parliament.

The Emergence of New Parties

Over the last few months the Slovakian political arena has witnessed the emergence of some new parties. They might, even if they do not win many votes, be an obstacle to some parties, notably the SMER-SD, which might not win the absolute majority. They might also be the cause of a surprise as was the case in some neighbouring countries. In the Czech Republic, Tradition, Responsibility, Prosperity 09 (TOP 09) led by Karel Schwarzenberg and Public Affairs (VV) led by Radek John won a combined 27.58% of the vote in the general elections on 28th and 29th May 2010. In Poland,

the Palikot Movement (RPP) came third in the election on 9th October 2011 with 9.94% of the vote. Finally on 4th December 2011, Positive Slovenia, founded by the Mayor of Ljubljana, Zoran Jankovic won the election with 28.54% of the vote in the general elections. The Citizens’ List-Gregor Virant, another recently formed party, won 8.42% of the vote.

Amongst these new parties the Party of Ordinary People and Independent Personalities (OL), formed on 28th October last and led by Igor Matovic wants to bring new blood into Slovakian political life. Four of its candidates – Igor Matovic, Erika Jurinova, Martin Fecko, Jozef Viskupic – were elected on the SaS list in the election of 12th June 2010. The Free World Party (SSS) is led by Nora Mojsejova, a controversial business woman who presents TV reality shows. Her programme focuses on a decrease in VAT on basic foodstuffs and pharmaceutical products, an increase in the minimum wage and the minimum retirement pension and competition in the business world. Finally Nation and Justice-Our Party (NaS-ns) was formed by Anna Belousovova, who was excluded from the SNS but whose ideas resemble theirs very closely.

According to the most recent poll by the Focus Institute, published on 2nd February last Direction-Social Democracy (SMER-SD) is due to win the general elections with 41.4% of the vote, i.e. 72 seats. It is due to be followed by the Christian Democratic Movement (KDH) 9.6% (16 seats), the Democratic and Christian Union-Democratic Party (SDKU-DS) 8.2% (14 seats), Freedom and Solidarity (SaS) 7.6% (13 seats), Most-Hid 7.2% (13 seats) and the National Party (SNS), 5.6% (10 seats). Finally the Party of Ordinary People and Independent Personalities is due to make its entry into Parliament with 6.8% (12 seats). The People’s Party- Movement for a Democratic Slovakia led by Vladimir Meciar is due to win under 2%.

In a poll undertaken by the Public Affairs Institute, two thirds of Slovaks (64%) have quoted employment as being the most important issue at stake in the election (the unemployment rate lay at 13.59% - January 2012); 53% also quote a decline in living standards and 29% speak of the shortcomings of in the healthcare system and corruption.

Reminder of the General Election Results of June 12th 2010 in Slovakia

Turnout: 58.83%

Political Parties	No. of votes won	% of votes won	No. of seats won
Direction-Social Democracy (SMER-SD)	880 111	34,79	68
Democratic and Christian Union Democratic Party (SDKU-DS)	390 042	15,42	28
Freedom and Solidarity (SaS)	307 287	12,14	22
Christian Democratic Movement (KDH)	215 755	8,52	15
Most-Hid	205 538	8,12	14
National Party (SNS)	128 490	8,07	9
Hungarian Coalition Party (SMK)	109 638	4,33	0
Peoples Party-Movement for a Democratic Slovakia (LU-HZDS)	109 480	4,32	0
Others	180 044	7,24	0

Source : Slovakian Statistics Bureau: http://app.statistics.sk/nrsr_2010/sr/tab3.jsp?lang=sk

The Leftwing Opposition is due to win the Slovakian General Elections

4.3 million Slovaks are about to renew the 150 members of the National Council of the Republic (Narodna rada Slovenskej republiky), the only Chamber in Parliament, during the early general elections that will take place on 10th March next. The election follows the vote of no confidence against the government of Prime Minister, Iveta Radicova (Democratic and Christian Union-Democratic Party SDKU-DS), on 11th October last. 26 candidate lists are against each other in this election, which has been typified by a record number of candidates (52) who decided recently to quit the list of the party on which they had been registered. The Ordinary People and Independent People's Party (OL'aNO) led by Igor Matovic has been most affected by this: 30 of its candidates are now standing as independents.

728 Slovaks living abroad have registered to fulfil their civic duty by mail. There were 570 of them in the last general election on 12th June 2010. Most expat Slovaks live in the neighbouring Czech Republic; there are also a great number in the USA and Canada. Milan Vetrak, head of the office of Slovaks Abroad (USZZ) is expecting greater turnout on the part of expats than two years ago in response to the fall of Iveta Radicova's government, who was especially criticised by this population.

The referendum that the National Party (SNS) wanted to organise on the same day as the general elections regarding the Slovakian language (it wants Slovakian to be the country's only official language) will not take place. Many political analysts think that this popular consultation would have been anti-constitutional, since the use of minority languages in official communications is considered by the Slovakian Fundamental Law as a fundamental freedom and right. Hence it is obligatory to display bilingual posters in towns in which at least 20% of the population belong to a minority.

The official campaign started on 18th February. Just one week before the election the leftwing opposition, represented by Direction-Social Democracy (SMER-SD), a party led by former Prime Minister (2006-2010), Robert Fico, is still the main favourite in the polls.



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The Gorilla Affair, the name of the operation run by the Slovakian secret service that emerged in December with the publication of secret documents and the online recordings of internet conversations dating back to 2005-2006 are now the focus of the electoral campaign. The recordings revealed links between the political and business worlds. The conversations between Jaroslav Hascak, chairman of the financial group Penta, with several politicians including Jirko Malcharek (New Citizen's Alliance, ANO), the then Economy Minister (2005-2006), prove that bribes exchanged hands and that money was laundered during the privatisation of certain companies. They also reveal information – which has been backed up by other eye-witness accounts – about the funding of the country's main political parties. The Democratic and Christian Union and Democratic Party (SDKU-DS) led by outgoing Prime Minister Iveta Radicova, who was in office in 2005-2006 was the first to fall victim in this affair, notably because of the party's present leader, outgoing Foreign Minister and former Prime Minister (1998-2006), Mikulas Dzurinda and Finance Minister, Ivan Miklos. The other parties have not been spared, even though opposition leader Robert Fico (SMER-SD) purposely avoids talking of the issue (the recordings reveal that he had meetings with Penta CEO, Jaroslav Hascek).

On the request of Penta CEO, who maintained that the book threatened his rights, a Bratislava court banned the publication of a book on the Gorilla affair written by Tom Nicholson a Slovak/Canadian journalist, who was the first to reveal the scandal. In this affair no one seems to be in control anymore, neither the politicians nor the business world or the media, and everyone has been affected by the scandal that simply increases the defiance and disappointment that is already high, of the country's population with regard to the elites. Several demonstrations, in Bratislava and in the provinces, for example in Poprad and Prievidza, have been organised over the last few weeks to denounce the embezzlement that was revealed by the Gorilla affair. Another demonstration is due to take place on the eve of the election on 9th March.

Freedom and Solidarity (Sloboda a Solidarita, SaS), a

member of the outgoing government is suspected by many of being at the origin of the publication of the Gorilla affair. The party's leader, Richard Sulik, speaks of "an alliance of old corrupt structures". His party, created in 2008, and which did not exist at the time of the affair, is indeed the only one (with the Ordinary People and Independent People's Party) not to have been soiled by the scandal and may reap the benefits during the election. SaS is amongst the most virulent critics of the political leaders and the parties involved in the affair. Richard Sulik's party has however been drawn into the fray: former Defence Minister, Lubomir Galko (SaS) was forced to resign on 23rd November 2011 after it was revealed that he had ordered the secret services to spy on a journalist. Moreover Richard Sulik found himself under the spotlight on 23rd February last when a telephone conversation recording with businessman Marian Kocner was put online. It emerges that the SaS leader wanted (before the fall of the government on 11th October last) to replace Prime Minister Iveta Radicova by Finance Minister Ivan Miklos. The politician also reveals to Marian Kocner that several MPs in parties belonging to the government coalition were offered 300,000€ each if they voted in support of Dobrosla Trnka, a candidate standing for re-election as general prosecutor last December. Whilst one of these MPs was an SaS member, Richard Sulik did not deem it necessary to inform the police. He apologised after the publication of the recording online and promised that this kind of thing would not happen again. Richard Sulik also promised to give up his seat as MP if he did not win the most preference votes on 10th March next.

The recent politico-financial scandals are affecting the members and supporters of the rightwing parties more. On this end of the political scale, a new generation, which supports the EU less and which is more radical, is emerging and its members may rapidly rise to positions of responsibility. SDKU-DS leader, Mikulas Dzurinda declared that he was not planning to quit as head of his party, which usually holds a congress within the six months following the general elections; on this occasion his leadership may however be challenged, notably if the party fails to enter parliament on 10th March next.

Lucia Zitnanska, the outgoing Justice Minister declared that if the SDKU-DS was ousted from the National Council of the Republic, Mikulas Dzurinda should resign from his post. She has already announced that she might stand to succeed him and several of the party's regional leaders – Ondrej Matej from Presov, Martin Fedor from Trencin, have publicly declared their support to her.

Slovakia's main political parties have signed a text with three NGO's– Transparency International Slovakia, the Institute for Economic and Social Reform (INEKo) and the Institute for the Governance of Slovakia (SGI) – which commits them to improving the transparency of their funding methods. The text places emphasis on 7 measures, 6 of which are recommendations put forward by the Council of Europe. The People's Party –Movement for a Democratic Slovakia (LU-HDZ) led by Vladimir Meciar and the National Slovakian Party (SNS) refused to sign the pact.

According to the latest poll by MVK, Direction-Social Democracy (SMER-SD) is due to win the election easily with 40.6% of the vote, i.e. 84 seats. It is due

to be followed by the Christian Democratic Movement (KDH) that would then become the leading rightwing party with 12.7% of the vote (26 seats). The Ordinary People and Independent People's Party is due to win 7% (15 seats), Freedom and Solidarity (SaS), 6.1% (13 seats) and Most-Hid 5.9% (12 seats). A significant feature of this poll: the Democratic and Christian Union-Democratic Party (SDKU-DS) is not due to win the minimum 5% of the votes cast that are vital to enter parliament. The Hungarian Coalition Party (SMK) led by Pal Csaky and the National Party are also due to fall into the same category.

Moreover according to another poll by MVK, opposition leader, Robert Fico is, in the opinion of the Slovaks, the most credible politician in the country (37.1%). Outgoing Prime Minister Iveta Radicova comes second with 18.2% and the President of the Republic, Ivan Gasparovic, third (14.3%). However, when asked about the least credible politicians, the Slovaks quote Mikulas Dzurinda first (52.6%). The SKDU-DS leader runs ahead of the far right leader Jan Slota (SNS) who achieves 34.4%.

Robert Fico's Party, Direction-Social Democracy, (left) wins the absolute majority in the Slovakian elections, an all time first in the country.

Direction-Social Democracy (SMER-SD), a party led by former Prime Minister (2006-2010) Robert Fico easily won the early general elections that took place in Slovakia on 10th March. He won 44.41% of the vote and 83 of the 150 seats in the National Council of the Republic (Narodna rada Slovenskej republiky), the only chamber in Parliament, i.e. +15 in comparison with the general election on 12th June 2010. For the first time since the country's independence in 1993 a party has succeeded in won the absolute majority in the general elections.

SMER-SD came out ahead of the Christian-Democratic Movement (KDH) led by Jan Figel and the Ordinary People and Independents' Party

(OL'aNO) created on 28th October last and led by Igor Matovica which won 8.82% and 8.55% of the vote respectively and 16 seats each (+1 for the

RESULTS

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KDH). Most-Hid won 6.89% of the vote (13 seats, - 1). The Democratic and Christian Union-Democratic Party (SDKU-DS), the party led by outgoing Prime Minister Iveta Radicova won 6.09% and 11 seats (-17) and Freedom and Solidarity (Sloboda a Solidarita, SaS), 5.88% and 11 seats (- 11).

Turnout was higher than forecast in the polls. It totalled 59.11% ie very slightly more than the figure recorded in June 2010 (+ 0.28 points).

"The results surprised me," declared Robert Fico after the election. *"The main thing is that we have succeeded with the programme we offered the Slovaks as an alternative to the right,"* he added. *"We are against privatisations, support better legal protection for workers, we recommend major public investments. This is the programme we shall try to implement,"* he stressed. In spite of his wide majority the SMER-SD leader says he is ready to join forces with other parties that support his programme.

"More than the triumph of the left we are witnessing the collapse of the right, it has been devastated," indicates Etienne Boisserie, a historian specialised in Slovakia at the National Institute of Eastern Languages and Civilisation (INALCO). The liberal parties suffered because of the Gorilla scandal, the name given to the politico-financial affair that blew up after the online publication of recorded conversations in December, which reveal that there had been bribes and money laundering when businesses were privatised in 2006-2006, when the rightwing was in power. *"Around half of those who usually vote for the right believe that none of them deserve their confidence. The Gorilla affair has helped the protest parties by calling for the departure of the corrupt politicians,"* indicated Marian Lesko, a journalist for the economic magazine Trend, on the eve of the election. *"It is clear that we should blame Gorilla,"* declared Mikulas Dzurinda, leader of the SDKU-DS, outgoing Foreign Minister and former Prime Minister (1998-2006), when the results were announced. The scandal notably benefited the leftwing opposition and the new Ordinary People and Independents' Party which will be making its debut in Parliament. Igor Matovica, who quit Freedom and Solidarity (SaS) one year ago, says that he (successfully) passed a lie detector test to prove that he was clear of all corruption.

Over the last two years Robert Fico has critic-

sied the cuts in State spending undertaken by outgoing Prime Minister Iveta Radicova, who made the country's return to budgetary balance the priority of her government. In 2011 it lay at 4.6% (8.1% a year prior to this). *"We are against privatisations, we support a better protection of workers and greater state investments,"* he said. Mr Fico wants to do away with the flat tax set at 19% (for VAT, income tax and business tax) and to raise the latter two tax rates to 25% for the wealthiest Slovaks (people earning more than 33,000€) and to 22% for businesses whose profits rise over 30 million € annually. Robert Fico hopes to introduce a special tax of 0.7% on bank deposits. *"If you have record profits then you will have to pay record taxes,"* he declared during the campaign.

In spite of these declarations the results of Robert Fico's government (2006-2010) pleads in favour of the continuation of the present policy. When he was head of State the SMER-SD leader indeed succeeded in maintaining the liberal right's legacy whilst increasing the State's social spending, notably to reduce the effects of the international economic crisis. *"Whatever the government in charge of the country it will have around six weeks to show that it can consolidate the budget,"* declared Peter Kazimir (SMER-DS), possibly the future Finance Minister. *"We support public finance consolidation but not the detriment of the people with the lowest incomes. Our programme is pro-European. We support the protection of the euro zone and the euro as a strong European currency,"* indicated Robert Fico.

Slovakias' socio-economic situation is fragile even though the country recovered growth in 2011 (3.3%). Unemployment lies at 13.3% of the working population. *"Whoever wins these elections the government cannot afford to be lax with public finances,"* said Lubomir Korsnak, a financial analyst with UniCredit SpA.

Born 47 years ago (in the west of the country) in Topolcany, Robert Fico is a graduate of law from the University of Comenius and the State Institute and a graduate of law from the Slovakian Academy of Science in Bratislava. A member of the communist party in 1987, then of the Democratic Left Party (SDL), he entered Parliament for the first time in 1992. He quit the SDL after the general elections on 25th and 26th September 1998 when his party entered government without himself achieving a ministerial post. One year

later in December 1999 he founded his own party Direction (SMER).

Robert Fico started his professional career at the Institute of Law at the Justice Ministry before being appointed in 1994 as Slovakia's representative at the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg, a post he occupied for six years. In 2004 Direction absorbed the Democratic Left Party, the Social Democratic Party (SDSS) and Social Democratic Alternative (SDS). Two years later Robert Fico became Prime Minister after his party won the general elections on 17th June 2006. His party again won the elections on 12th June 2010 but he could not form a government because he could not offer a coherent line

of action and was unable to rally people to his name. In October last he managed to clinch the organisation of an election from Iveta Radicova's government in exchange for the SMER-SD vote in support of the adoption of the European Stability and Financial Facility (EFSF).

After this victory Robert Fico, who, during his first mandate as head of the country joined forces with the far right National Party (SNS) and who does not hesitate to attack the Hungarian minority (around 10% of the population) may create a certain amount of tension between Bratislava and Budapest where nationalist Viktor Orban (FIDESZ) holds office.

Results of the General Elections on 10th March 2012 in Slovakia

Turnout: 59.11%

Political Parties	No. of votes won	% of votes cast	No of seats won
Direction- Social Democracy (SMER-SD)	1 134 280	44.41	83
Christian Democratic Movement (KDH)	225 361	8.82	16
Ordinary People's and Independents' Party (OL'aNO)	218 537	8.55	16
Most-Hid	176 088	6,89	13
Democratic and Christian Union – Democratic Party (SDKU-DS)	155 744	6.09	11
Freedom and Solidarity (Sloboda a Solidarita, SaS)	150 266	5.88	11
National Party (SNS)	116 420	4.55	0
Hungarian Coalition Party (SMK)	109 483	4.28	0
Others	232 425	10.53	0

Source : Slovakian Statistics Bureau: http://nrsr2012.statistics.sk/priebezne/tab_Pv_sk.html

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