

Analysis of the Elections 2010 Results in Slovakia

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Abstract: *The results of the Parliamentary 2010 elections in Slovakia can be compared with those of the elections in 2002. Despite their victory in these elections, the former coalition party SMER was forced to go into the opposition and the succeeding government was formed by four centre-right parties, two of them were parliamentary newcomers. In this context, based on a series of aspects of its results, the 2010 Elections turned out to be a historic milestone — Slovakia witnessed the end of the politics with the previous Prime Minister, Vladimír Mečiar, one of the most significant politicians in Slovak history. —, The candidate's preference votes have significantly gained in importance, and for the very first time in the history of the independent Slovak Republic, the government is led by a woman prime minister and lacks members with a past in the ŠTB (Secret Police). The author analyses also a curiosity, which emerged from the parallels between election results of 2010 in the Czech and Slovak Republics.*

Keywords: *2002, losers, winners, new parties, preferential voting, Ivetta Radičová*

Introduction

For the whole period of four years it looked like that Robert Fico, the former Prime Minister and the head of Smer-SD (Direction – Social Democracy), would be ruling Slovakia at least till 2014, if not forever. However, the situation changed

and the Elections 2010 brought many surprises and changes for Slovakia. The most successful party ended in the opposition, four central-right parties created the new government, the controversial SNS (Slovak National Party) was rescued by two thousand voters and previously strong political parties — ĽS-HZDS (People's Party – Movement for a Democratic Slovakia) and SMK (Party of the Hungarian Coalition) — remained out of the Parliament. On the ground of these results the government of populists-nationalists was replaced by new central-right parties.

The results of the Elections 2010 are very similar to those of the Elections 2002. The favoured party of those elections, Smer-SD, ended at the third position and in spite of the fact that Mečiar's party HZDS won the elections gaining 19 % of votes, four central-right parties had the fragile parliamentary majority of 78 deputies. The government was formed by SDKÚ-DS (Slovak Democratic and Christian Union – Democratic Party), KDH (Christian Democratic Movement), SMK (Slovak Hungarian Coalition) and a new political party — ANO (Alliance of the New Citizen) and it was formed very quickly, similarly to this year's elections.

Literature overview

Due to the recent Slovak parliamentary elections held in June 2010, this topic is not deeply covered in Slovak literature. Comments by Slovak political scientists and sociologists are to be found mainly in newspapers articles, the literature of this topic is at the disposal only by Institute for Public Affairs (Gyárfášová et. al., 2011) and Institute for Sociology for SAS. The article is based mainly on statistical data, comments by political scientists and sociologists and influential newspapers articles.

Pre-election situation

— Predominant topics in election campaign

According to the surveys, election campaigns in Slovakia don't have big impact on voter's behaviour (IVO, 2010). Slovak voter's opinion is used to being formed during such a political period; therefore, during an election campaign in not much emphasis is put on political TV debates and presentation of long-term visions. Political parties devoted their campaigns to their traditional themes, throughout which they tried to communicate and declare their orientation and consolidate their position before elections. Among the most important an economic problem discussed in this campaign was the Greek bailout loan, which was properly and clever used by the then-opposition parties SDKÚ-DS and SaS (Freedom and Solidarity). Robert Fico was forced to defend the government's position and refused to discuss the issue in

parliament. Other major economic issues focused on in the campaign were the state of the Slovak economy, mainly unemployment and of the state budget deficit.

Robert Fico was trying to divert attention from his government scandals and economic problems and attacked his biggest political rival, by accusing SDKÚ-DS of money laundering through the party's funding. On the basis of these events, Mikuláš Dzurinda, chairman of SDKÚ-DS, decided not to run in the elections. The SDKÚ-DS selected a new leader, the most popular opposition politician, Iveta Radičová. Shortly before elections Robert Fico had to face similar doubts about the financing of his party, which were intensified two days before elections, when recordings with a voice similar to Fico's was made public. Based on election results, these events didn't have any serious impact on Smer-SD popularity.

A week before the election, a flood occurred in Slovakia, which had its impact on pre-election discussion. Coalition and opposition parties were fast in offering the solutions and help to people, who suffered from the flood (SME, 2010).

The traditional and always ongoing topic in elections in Slovakia is the "Hungarian card." This year supported by nationalist politics of Viktor Orbán, mainly after approval of the law of dual citizenship that contributed to the nationalist tone of campaign in Slovakia. One side was traditionally represented by SNS with huge support from Smer-SD, and on the other hand, defending the interests of the Slovak Hungarians — SMK and with a steady and moderate tone by Most-Híd.

Three losers of Elections 2010 — Smer, HZDS, SMK

The turnout was expected to be about 50 % or less. The final turnout was 58 % and this result surprised politicians, as well as political scientists (SME, 2010). The largest turnout was in the region of Bratislava (62.3 %), the smallest was in eastern Slovakia (53 %) (Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic, 2010).

Smer-SD gained 34.79 % of the votes, improving their election result from 2006 by more than 5 %. Although Smer-SD dominated the elections 2010, it wasn't able to find partners and create a coalition for the next 4 years. Party Smer-SD was met by the same destiny as its coalition partner ĽS-HZDS in 1998 and 2002, respectively. The first party refusing the possible coalition with Smer-SD became SaS, followed by SDKÚ-DS and shortly before elections also KDH and Most-Híd declared their attitude not to govern with Smer-SD after elections. The main objections were politics of coalition led by Smer-SD and main scandals of its government. By contrast, to the parties willing to create a coalition with Fico's party belonged to ĽS-HZDS, SNS, a clear statement wasn't made by SMK.

During their term in office Smer-SD reached extremely high popularity which can be compared to the popularity of Mečiar in the 1990s. However, their popularity

started to decline slowly. Their results in the 2010 Election were remarkable but it is necessary to add, that SMER lured the voters of their coalition partners – HZDS and SNS — away and this turned out to be a crucial step.¹

2010 election was a big challenge also for political scientists (SME, 2010). Several trends such as a decrease of voters of HZDS and SMK were obvious in the last months, but nobody was able to predict the final results. The most prominent political scientists predicted a formation of the mixed coalition of SMER and parties of the previous opposition which was supported by the pre-election surveys.² However, during the election the phenomenon of a “hidden voter” — already known as a voter of HZDS in elections in 1998 and 2002 — appeared (Slosiarik, 2010). This type of voter behaves like *‘he’s ashamed to present his sympathy for a party’* and this influenced not only the pre-election surveys but apparently also the exit polls which tend to be more or less exact as the estimation of election results. According to both exit polls held during election, Smer-SD was supposed to gain about 29 % of the votes, whereas according to the final results they reached more than 34 %. Apparently the “hidden voter” shifted from HZDS towards Smer-SD (IVO; SME, 2010).

The Elections 2010 brought other very significant changes for Slovakia, as well. After 20 years in politics, the era of three-time Prime Minister Vladimir Mečiar had ended in 2010. The party, which attacked the popularity records in the 1990s, was losing its voters slowly and despite of the fact they had won the election in 1998 and 2002, HZDS wasn’t able to form a government and was forced to remain in the opposition. In 2006 HZDS represented the smallest party in the Parliament but it became a coalition party of the Fico government. Due to its lacklustre political programme and people, Smer lured its voters away and HZDS remained out of the Parliament.

In the election campaign finale the SMK attacked Most-Híd with an offensive campaign, with which the parties fought over the same voter. Despite a tough campaign, Most-Híd declared a willingness to cooperate with SMK afterwards (SME, 2010). On the basis of elections results, Hungarian voters in Slovakia preferred the more tolerant and not aggressive political style of Most-Híd. In addition, Most-Híd successfully addressed the Slovak voter, too (IVO, 2010).

Commentators and political scientists were surprised by the electoral failure of SMK in 2010. The decline in number of its voters was obvious in recent years, but its presence in Parliament was expected. However, due to radicalism of opinions of this party, support of the controversial Orbán’s party FIDESZ and attacks on Most-Híd, SMK did not pass the threshold of 5 % necessary for getting into the Parliament and it became a non-parliamentary party for the first time in the last two decades. Immediately after this electoral flop, the SMK presidium resigned.

New parties on the horizon

New political parties emerged in both elections in 1998 and 2002 and they became directly members of the coalition. This happened to SOP (Party of Citizen's Understanding) in 1998 and 2002 to ANO. However, both parties suffered the same fate and after one electoral term they ended out of the Parliament. In 2006 only the well-known and long-term established parties got over the threshold of 5 %. In this year's elections two new parties surprised with their results. SAS (Freedom and Solidarity) gained more than 12 % of votes. The party of the former counsellor of the Ministry of Treasury and the author of the flat rate tax — Richard Sulík — used in their pre-election campaign new ideas and predominantly new communication mediums. They became popular also thanks to communication with their potential voters via Facebook, Twitter or personal Sulík's blog. This met with success and SaS became popular mainly among young voters.

The second successful new party is Most-Híd, although its prominent members are well-known politicians for years. Due to disappointment with the politics of SMK, its popular former leader Béla Bugár decided to create a new political party based on Slovak — Hungarian reconciliation. The Slovak part is represented by Rudolf Chmel, the former Minister of Culture. Most-Híd offered places on the candidate's list also to representatives of OKS (Civic Conservative Party).

Thanks also to this party, Most-Híd gained 8.12 % and they got into the Parliament as well as they became immediately part of the new coalition. Members of OKS were originally on nonvotable positions, however, the system of preferential voting helped them to get among 14 deputies of Most-Híd which are in the Parliament. OKS candidates hit the mark thanks to targeted campaign mostly in Bratislava and influential magazines. So far their cooperation with Most-Híd has been without bigger problems.

Members of the civic movement called Obyčajní ľudia (Ordinary people) met with remarkable success. These four members were at the very end of the candidate's list of SaS, on positions 147–150. However, thanks to their very consistent campaign in regional newspapers all around Slovakia, they skipped all other candidates from the list and became members of the Parliament on behalf of SaS. Igor Matovič, the leader of Obyčajní ľudia worked as editor in the network of regional newspapers, where he published every week his blog on the current political situation. Since the election Igor Matovič has made himself famous due to his statements and conflicts with representatives of opposition, meanwhile he left SaS deputy club and acts as an independent deputy. The plan of the civic movement Obyčajní ľudia for 2013 is to establish a new political party but the 3 other deputies promised to remain part of the parliamentary club SaS until that.

New government

An agreement of new coalition formed by SDKÚ-DS, KDH, SaS and Most-Híd with the support of 79 members of the Parliament was reached on June 28 2010. SDKÚ got 5 ministries — Prime Minister (Iveta Radičová), Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Mikuláš Dzurinda), Ministry of Education (Eugen Jurzyca), Ministry of Justice (Lucia Žitňanská), and Ministry of Finance (Ivan Mikloš). SaS got 4 ministries — Ministry of Social Affairs (Jozef Mihál), Ministry of Defence (Ľubomír Galko), Ministry of Culture and Tourism (Daniel Krajcer), Ministry of Economy and Construction (Juraj Miškov). The two smallest parties got 3 ministries: KDH — Ministry of Transport, Posts and Telecommunications (Ján Figeľ), Ministry of Interior Affairs (Daniel Lipšic) and Ministry of Health (Ivan Uhliarík), the smallest party — Most-Híd : Ministry of Agriculture (Zsolt Simon), Deputy Prime Minister for Human Rights and Minorities (Rudolf Chmel) and Ministry of Environment (Józef Nagy).³

For the first time since 1948, all cabinet members and coalition deputies are without record in the ŠTB archives, i.e. they didn't collaborate with the neither Communist Secret Service, nor weren't members of KSČ (Czechoslovak Communist Party).

The new government is a breakthrough for Slovakia also from other point of view. For the first time Slovakia is ruled by a woman as Prime Minister. Iveta Radičová was participating in politics marginally since the 1990 and actively since 2005 when she became the Minister of Social Affairs in the second Dzurinda's government. In 2006 she gained the most of the preferential votes of SDKÚ-DS, in 2009 she was the most successful woman in the finale of the presidential election, where won her competitor Ivan Gašparovič. After having voted instead of her colleague in the Parliament, she resigned and considered leaving the politics for good. Due to the situation around SDKÚ-DS⁴ at the beginning 2010 she was appointed the election leader for the election 2010 and after she became the first female Prime Minister in Slovakia, and second in Central Europe as well.⁵ And so, Iveta Radičová belongs to few women leaders in Europe.

The year 2010 was the election year in 3 countries of Central Europe — Slovakia, Czech Republic and Hungary. Comparing the results of the Slovak election with Czech results, we can say that they were like looking into the mirror. The winner of the elections in both countries didn't form the new coalition and was forced to go into the opposition. The coalition was formed by central-right parties, in both countries with two new parties (Slovakia — Most Híd and SaS, Czech Republic — TOP 09 and Věci veřejné). The new prime ministers weren't supposed to be leaders but after resignation of the chairman of their party they were selected. The governments in both countries fight for budget responsibility and against corruption (Novák, Suchá, 2010).

Conclusion

With time distance even more similarities with the 2002 scenario and post-election situation in Czech Republic have appeared. Diversity of coalition parties has emerged and the first problems have occurred since the creation of coalition in July 2010. Despite of the inefficient communication and disputes within coalition, coalition breakdown and early election are unlikely. To the major reasons certainly belongs the fear of Robert Fico's comeback, which again attacks popularity records in surveys.

Notes

- ¹ See: Presuny voličov 2006–2010 http://www.ivo.sk/buxus/docs/Parlamentne_volby_2010/Prezentacia_vyskum_volicskeho_spravania.pdf
- ² Comments were published in pre-election issue of daily SME, see: <http://volby.sme.sk/c/5411911/analytici-pre-sme-smer-asi-zostane-pri-moci.html>
- ³ List of the government members cited from: <http://www.vlada.gov.sk/21939/vlada-sr-od-9-7-2010.php>
- ⁴ As mentioned above, SDKÚ-DS was accused by then-prime minister Robert Fico of money laundering through party's funding. Iveta Radičová won the primaries to Ivan Mikloš, former Minister of Finances.
- ⁵ The first female Prime Minister in Central Europe was Hanna Suchocka, Prime Minister of Poland in 1992–1993, under the presidency of Lech Walesa.

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