

Prime Minister Robert Fico is running favourite in the presidential election in Slovakia

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Translated by Helen Levy

Analysis

On 15th March the Slovaks are being called to ballot for the first round of the presidential election. 14 people are running i.e. more than ever registered in the country before. The Constitution does not allow the present head of State Ivan Gasparovic, in office since 17th April 2004 and who has already undertaken two mandates, from running again Prime Minister Robert Fico (Direction-Social Democracy, SMER-SD), the country's strong man, announced that he would be running on 18th December. The main favourite in this election, he might however encounter problems in the second round of voting if he does not succeed in asserting his position in the first round. If none of the candidates wins more than 50% of the vote on 15th March a second round will take place on 29th March.

The role of the President and the candidates

The President of the Republic enjoys little power. Elected for five years he is the commander in chief of the armed forces; he negotiates and ratifies international agreements, promulgates laws and can grant amnesties.

Any candidate running for the supreme office has to collate at least 15,000 voters' signatures or those of a minimum of 15 MPs who support him.

14 people are official candidates:

- Robert Fico Direction-Social Democracy (SMER-SD), present Prime Minister;
- Pavol Hrusovsky, supported by the Christian Democratic Movement (KDH) - a party he led from 2000 to 2009 - the Democratic and Christian Union - Democratic Party (SDKU-DS) and Most-Hid (which means "bridge") former leader of the National Council of the Republic (*Narodna rada Slovenskej republiky*), the only chamber in Parliament;
- Gyula Bardos, the first personality from the Hungarian minority (10% of the population) ever to stand for this position;
- Jan Carnogursky, independent, former Prime Minister of Slovakia (1991-1992) and former leader of the Christian Democratic Movement (1990-2000);
- Milan Knazko, former Culture and Foreign Minister.

He was also one of the leaders of the 1989 revolution which led to the fall of the Communist system;

- Andrej Kiska, philanthropist, founder of the Angel of Charity society;
- Radoslav Prochazka, former member of the Christian Democratic Movement, deputy leader of the National Council of the Republic, lawyer and university professor, creator of the forum for reflection, Alfa;
- Helena Mezenska (Party of Ordinary People and Independents, OL'aNO);
- Viliam Fischer, heart surgeon;
- Milan Melnik, scientist;
- Jozef Behyl, independent, humanitarian;
- Stanislav Martincko, supported by the Coalition of the Citizens of Slovakia;
- Jozef Simko (Party of Modern Slovakia, SMS), Mayor of Rimavska Sobota, a town in the region of Banska Bystrica;
- Jan Jurista, (Communist Party, KSS), former ambassador.

Radoslav Prochazka's priorities are the reorganisation of the institutions, the replacement of the leaders of the Constitutional Court and the introduction of an assessment of government action. "Slovakia needs a strong president who can take on board the people's needs and interests," he declared. He also wants part of the civil service to move from the capital of Bratislava to the regions of Kosice and Banska Bystrica.

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Philanthropist Andrej Kiska said that "Slovakia needs an independent president who is experienced and not someone who is dominating," alluding to the Prime Minister Robert Fico.

Milan Knazko believes that by standing for the supreme office Robert Fico is abandoning his electorate; he has chosen to "desert his post as Prime Minister because he cannot honour his promises," he indicated. He maintained that if he is elected he would refuse to sign any law that aimed to increase taxation.

Robert Fico's Wager

The Prime Minister who has chosen *Pripraveny pre Slovensko* (Ready for Slovakia) as his slogan has the support of 83 MPs of his party as well as outgoing President Ivan Gasparovic. By standing in the Presidential election Robert Fico has launched a real wager. Indeed if he does not win the election in the first round he might find it hard to win on 29th March against a rival who might succeed in rallying all of the head of government's opponents to his name.

The leader of the Christian-Democratic Movement, Jan Figel also said that 2014 might be the political end for Robert Fico. He recalled that former Prime Minister (1993-1994 and 1994-1998) Vladimir Meciar (Movement for a Democratic Slovakia, HZDS) had also tried to be elected as the Head of State on two occasions (1999 and 2004).

Three reasons might explain why the Prime Minister wants to occupy the supreme office. Firstly Robert Fico seems to be the only possible candidate for his party. No other personality seems to be capable of winning the election. Secondly the Prime Minister is depending on the support of the National Council of the Republic to stay in power. He might as a result of this lose his post in the next general elections forecast for the spring of 2016. If he becomes head of State he would be guaranteed power for the next five years. Victory for the head of government in the election on 15th and 29th March would certainly lead to the "presidentialisation" of Slovakia, a country where the head of State enjoys little power and has no control over the political agenda.

Undoubtedly Robert Fico has watched the career of his neighbour Milos Zeman closely (Citizens' Rights Party,

SPO), elected as head of the Czech Republic on 26th January 2013. The first Czech head of State to be elected by direct universal suffrage Milos Zeman has greater powers than his predecessors. On several occasions he has shown that he wants to influence political life to the point of him being criticised for his authoritarian style.

The Prime Minister indicated that he would not resign as head of government before the presidential election. He will not fail to use his present power during the electoral campaign.

Robert Fico's participation and his possible victory raises the issue of the succession as head of his party and government. There are several likely candidates to replace him including the present leader of the Council of the Republic, Pavol Paska, Home Affairs Minister Robert Kalinak and Culture Minister Marek Madaric.

Direction-Social Democracy has governed Slovakia since the general election on 10th March 2012. It was the first party to win an absolute majority in the general elections since independence in 1993. The west and the north of the country are the Prime Minister's bastions. The latter stands as the representative of the people and of the poorest Slovaks. He is popular because of his social policy: indeed he has always refused – including at the height of the economic crisis – to reduce retirement pensions and social benefits. In January 2013, he also abolished the flat tax rate of 19% on VAT, income and businesses raising taxes on the latter to 23%. Slovakia experienced growth of 1% in 2013 and 1.8% in 2012.

Many analysts and politicians point to the threat that Robert Fico's victory brings to the balance of power. Direction-Social Democracy controls the government and also most of the regions (6 out of 8).

"We do not have to apologise for winning the general elections on 10th March 2012" declared the Prime Minister who also maintained that harmony between the president of the Republic, Parliament and the head of government were the basis of the country's stability which he would like to embody and strengthen. "The head of State must unite the country if the Prime Minister is dividing it," indicated Robert Fico. An alliance between the head of State and government, notably regarding the country's foreign policy (the Prime Minister wants to represent Slovakia in the European

Council) is vital in Robert Fico's eyes who stresses that none of the other 13 candidates seems interested in dialogue with the government.

« *Robert Fico is transforming the presidential election into a referendum over whether the Slovaks want just one person to govern Slovakia,* » indicated Matus Kostolny, editor in chief of the daily SME.

According to the polls most of Direction-Social Democracy's followers want to Robert Fico to remain as Prime Minister.

A divided right

The Slovakian right is extremely divided, which political expert Miroslav Kusy believes will continue and become more acute. It did not learn from its defeat in the general elections in March 2012. The right also suffered greatly in the Gorilla Affair, the name of the Slovakian secret service operation which came to light in December 2011 after the publication of secret documents online revealing telephone conversations dating back to 2005 and 2006 (a time when the right was in office) which highlighted the links between the political and business communities.

More than two years later the parties on the right have not succeeded in improving their image. Recently Lucia Zitnanska, former deputy leader of the Christian and Democratic Union-Democratic Party, Miroslav Beblavy and Magdalena Vasaryova left their part and founded "Let's create Slovakia", a structure they qualify as "a political project."

Jozef Kollar, Martin Chren and Juraj Droba left Liberty and Solidarity with two former ministers from Iveta Radicova's government (2010-2012) – Juraj Miskov and Daniel Krajcer – and joined a new party NOVA, created by two former members of the Christian Democratic Movement, Daniel Lipsic and Jana Zitnanska. 75 other members of the rightwing party – including one third of its regional authorities, joined them.

Finally the Party of Ordinary People and Independents also lost two representatives: Alojz Hlina and Maria Ritomska.

However beyond the rightwing the entire political class was affected and its image damaged. The Slovaks do not trust their elites and are showing it.

The Christian-Democratic Movement, Democratic and

Christian Union-Democratic Party and Most Hid have rallied together to form the People's Platform founded on shared values after the message issued on 17th November which celebrates the Velvet Revolution (nezna revolucia) of 1989 which led to the fall of the communist system in Czechoslovakia. These three parties failed however to appoint a candidate for the presidential election.

The Christian Democratic Movement and Most Hid support Pavol Hrusovsky but the Democratic and Christian Union-Democratic Party rejected this proposal. The party led by Pavol Freso supports former Prime Minister (2010-2012) Iveta Radicova whilst even she has declared that she did not want to take part in the election. According to the polls the former Prime Minister was the only one capable of beating Robert Fico in March. For its part Liberty and Solidarity appointed its representative Peter Osusky on 11th June 2013 as its candidate in the presidential election before he relinquished at the beginning of February.

Three presidential election candidates – Jan Carnogursky, Pavol Hrusovsky and Radoslav Prochazka – are from the Christian-Democratic Movement. The latter two are, along with Milan Knazko and Andrej Kiska, believed to be the main challengers to Prime Minister Robert Fico.

Jan Baranek, a political expert from the agency Polis indicated that the fact that Gyula Bardos and Jan Carnogursky were standing weakened Pavol Hrusovsky position. In his opinion some of Most Hid's supporters will vote for a candidate from the Hungarian minority and that many close to the Democratic and Christian Union-Democratic Party will vote for Jan Carnogursky. Moreover according to the polls Pavol Hrusovsky will win half of the votes of the supporters of the Christian-Democratic Movement whilst 90% of the Direction-Social Democracy supporters will vote for Robert Fico on 15th March.

The most recent poll by Median for the radio-TV station RTVS credits Robert Fico with 38.8% of the vote in the first round of the election. He is due to be followed by Andrej Kiska, who is due to win 18.6%, Milan Knazko, 12.9% and Radoslav Prochazka, 9.9%. Pavol Hrusovsky is credited with 5.7%, Helena Mezenska 5.6%, Gyula Bardos 2.6%, Viliam Fischer 2.1% and Jan Carnogursky 1.8%. The four other candidates (Milan

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Melnik, Jozef Behyl, Jozef Simko and Jan Jurista) are due to win less than 1% of the vote.
The head of government is also the politician the Slova-

kians believe to be the most serious and most worthy of confidence: 34.7% said this in a poll undertaken by MVK.

Results of the General Elections on 14th October 2012 in Montenegro

Turnout: 69.6%

Political Parties	% of votes won	No. of seats won	No. of seats won	No. of seats won
Ivan Gasparovic (Direction-Social Democracy, SMER-SD)	876 061	46,71	1 234 787	55,53
Iveta Radicova (Democratic and Christian Union, SDKU-DS, Christian-Democratic Movement, KDH, Civic Conservative Party, OKS, Hungarian Coalition Party, SMK-MKP)	713 735	38,05	988 808	44,47
Frantisek Miklosko (Conservatives-Democrats, KDS)	101 573	5,42		
Zuzana Martinakova (Civic Forum, SF)	96 035	5,12		
Milan Melnik (Movement for a Democratic Slovakia, HZDS)	45 985	2,45		
Dagmara Bollova (independent)	21 378	1,14		
Milan Sidor (Communist Party, KSS)	20 862	1,11		

Source: Agence France Presse

Andrej Kiska is the new president of the Republic of Slovakia

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Results

Andrej Kiska, who was running as an independent was elected on 29th March as President of the Republic of Slovakia in the second round of voting. With 59.3% of the vote he easily drew ahead of outgoing Prime Minister Robert Fico (Direction-Social Democracy, SMER-SD) who won 40.61% of the vote. In the first round the latter won 28.01% of the vote and Andrej Kiska 24.01%. Andrej Kiska won 7 of the 8 Slovakian regions; only Trencin voted mainly in support of Robert Fico. He also achieved higher results in the country's larger towns, notably Bratislava (74.16% of the vote).

Turnout lay at 50.48%, which was higher than the rate registered in the 1st round (+ 7.08 points).

Results of the Presidential election on 15th and 29th March 2014 in Slovakia

Turnout: 43.40% (1st round) and 50.48% (2nd round)

Political Parties	No of votes won (1st round)	% of votes won (1st round)	No of votes won (2nd round)	% of votes won (2nd round)
Andrej Kiska (independent)	455 996	24.01	1 307 065	59.38
Robert Fico (Direction-Social Democracy, SMER-SD)	531 919	28.01	893 841	40.61
Radoslav Prochazka	403 548	21.25		
Milan Knazko	244 401	12.87		
Gyula Bardos	97 035	5.11		
Pavol Hrusovsky (Christian Democratic Movement, KDH, Democratic and Christian Union-Democratic Union SDKU-DS, and Most-Hid)	63 298	3.33		
Helena Mezenska (Party of Ordinary People and Independents, OL'aNO)	45 180	2.38		
Jan Jurista (Communist Party, KSS)	12 209	0.64		
Jan Carnogursky (independent)	12 207	0.64		
Viliam Fischer	9 514	0.50		
Jozef Behyl	9 126	0.48		
Milan Melnik	7 678	0.40		
Jozef Simko (Modern Slovakian Party, SMS)	4 674	0.25	w	
Stanislav Martincko (Coalition of Slovakian Citizens)	2 547	0		

Source: Agence France Presse

"I want to thank the voters who gave me a strong mandate. I shall fulfil all of the promises I made. I promise to be the president of all citizens; I shall work to unite and motivate people so that we can be proud of our country, so that people feel good here," declared Andrej Kiska when the results were announced. "Andrej Kiska may attract supporters of the candidates who failed in the first round and can be sure of any protest vote whilst Robert Fico is especially counting on the turnout of his party," maintained Grigorij Meseznikov, Director of the Public Affairs Institute (IVO) as he spoke during the two rounds. Indeed the independent candidate clearly benefited from a wave of anti-Robert feeling sentiment and the mistrust of the population regarding the political classes. "Andrej Kiska's victory shows that the Slovaks want a president who can represent them all (...) Robert Fico failed to mo-

tivate his supporters. Many voters are disappointed with his government," indicated Grigorij Meseznikov.

The independent candidate's campaign, which focused on the fight to counter corruption and the concentration of power, was a success amongst Slovaks who are concerned about a possible presidentialisation of the country's political system and especially about seeing one party holding all of the power. "It was not a vote for Kiska but one against Robert Fico and the threat he represented in terms of his party's control over all positions of power," indicated political scientist Samuel Abraham. In this regard the vote on 29th March recalls two unsuccessful bids by former Prime Minister (1993-1994 and 1994-1998) Vladimir Meciar (Movement for a Democratic Slovakia, HZDS) to be elected as head of State (1999 and 2004).

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"Andrej Kiska is a man without political opinion and with no leadership skills but he is the ideal joker for all of those who hate traditional politics and therefore the policy undertaken by Robert Fico. For the first time ever the Prime Minister failed to estimate a new trend and a change in public opinion which is no longer directed against either left or right but against politics as such," writes Dag Danis, a political editorialist for the daily *Dnes*.

In spite of his popularity (linked to his anti-austerity policy and his defence of the poorest and the middle classes) and the support provided to him by the outgoing President of the Republic Ivan Gasparovic, Prime Minister Robert Fico who was quick to qualify the presidential elections as a "referendum on his party – Direction-Social Democracy," therefore lost his wager over becoming head of State. During the campaign for the 2nd round the head of government criticised his rival's past whom he qualified as a "usurer" (Andrej Kiska has managed consumer credit companies) and accused him of being close to the Church of Scientology. Religion is important in Slovakia where 60% of the population declare they are Catholic. Robert Fico has also highlighted his Catholic upbringing on several occasions.

"Even if he loses Robert Fico will continue to be Prime Minister, and the government and parliament will continue their work," indicated Pavol Paska (SMER-SD) the leader of the Council of the Republic, the only chamber in Parliament (*Narodna rada Slovenskej republiky*) between rounds. "Robert Fico will not resign from his post and will try to remain as Prime Minister until the end of his mandate in 2016 in spite of his shaken authority," declared Grigorij Meseznikov.

51 year-old, Andrej Kiska was born in Poprad, a town in the centre of Slovakia. He is a graduate from the electri-

cal engineering faculty of the Technological University of Bratislava. He started his professional career as a designer before founding TatraCredit, Triangle and Quatro in 1996, three consumer credit companies which he sold in 2005 to the Slovakian bank VUB. A multi-millionaire, he created the Good Angel (*Dobry Anjel*), charity in the same year with Igor Brosmann, an association which provides financial support to poor Slovakian and Czech families whose children are seriously ill, to which he donated 2.5 million €. Andrej Kiska resigned from the board on 1st June 2013 to devote himself to the presidential election.

Andrej Kiska, who was the first to say he would be running for president in this election in the autumn of 2012, is also the first head of the Slovakian State not to have a communist past since the country's independence in 1993.

It remains to be seen what the new head of State – a novice in politics, who is positioned above the parties but whose idea of politics is unclear - will do with his term in office. He has said that he wants to provide a counterbalance to the government led by Robert Fico. "The new head of State is certainly less experienced than Robert Fico but he supports democracy, the market economy and a pro-Western direction in terms of foreign policy," indicated Dag Danis. "The only danger is that Prime Minister Fico, once vanquished, will now pick a fight with the new President of the Republic," maintains Grigorij Meseznikov.

Andrej Kiska will be sworn in on 15th June the day Ivan Gasparovic's second mandate comes to an end. He said that his first foreign visit will "naturally" take him to the Czech Republic.

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