

Slovenian general elections on 24 April: PM Janez Jansa could come out ahead but not be able to form a majority to govern

On 24 April, the Slovenes will be called upon to renew the 90 members of the Drzavni Zbor, the lower chamber of the bicameral parliament. This date was chosen by the President of the Republic, Borut Pahor, because he wants the government to be formed before the summer.

In October, the Slovenes will be invited to elect a new head of state: Borut Pahor, who is finishing his second term, cannot be re-elected. Finally, voters will renew their local elected representatives in November.

It should be noted that these general elections of 24 April are the first to be held on schedule in the country since the elections of 21 September 2008.

20 political parties are running in the elections. According to the opinion poll conducted by the Mediana Institute between 21 and 24 March, the Democratic Party (SDS) of outgoing Prime Minister Janez Jansa is running neck and neck with the Movement for Freedom (GS) of Robert Golob. The first party is expected to win 16.8% of the vote and the second 16.7%. The Social Democrats (SD) are expected to win 9.4% and the Left (L), New Slovenia (NSi) 5%.

JANEZ JANSKA, A STRUGGLING OUTGOING PRIME MINISTER

Following the general elections on 3 June 2018, Marjan Sarec (Marjan Sarec List, LMS) formed a government including, in addition to his own, 4 other parties: the Social Democrats (SD), the Modern Party of the Centre (SMC), the Alenka Bratusek Alliance (ZaAB) and the Democratic Party of Pensioners (DeSUS). This coalition was supported by The Left (L). It split at the end of 2019 over the health reform sought by

Marjan Sarec when Finance Minister Andrej Bertonec publicly opposed the project before submitting his resignation. The Left then stopped supporting the government.

Prime Minister Marjan Sarec resigned on 27 January 2020, but while everyone expected snap elections which, according to opinion polls, would have been in favour of Marjan Sarec's List, Janez Jansa (Democratic Party, SDS), managed to rally around the Modern Centre Party, the Democratic Party of Pensioners and New Slovenia (NSi). He won the confidence of the lower house on 3 March 2020. The Democratic Party of Pensioners left the government in December 2020 following disagreements with the Prime Minister.

Janez Jansa's government has faced numerous protests during his two years in office. Slovenes have often taken to the streets to express their discontent, opposition MPs have tabled numerous motions of no-confidence, but to no avail. Janez Jansa has also been called to order by the European Union, notably for his policy towards the media, the Prime Minister being accused of not respecting media plurality. Thus, at the end of 2020, he stopped paying the Slovenian Information Agency (STA) the public funds that are usually allocated to it and that it needs to function. The agency finally received its subsidy almost a year later, in November 2021.

Janez Jansa is campaigning on the higher wages and pensions he has introduced and a significant drop in the unemployment rate (4.1% in February 2022). He promises that if voters allow him to keep his position, Slovenia will be among the fifteen most developed

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countries in the world in a few years. He has also been fighting for a bigger defence budget and for more investment in health care.

Even if it comes out ahead on 24 April, the Democratic Party (SDS) will find it difficult to form a majority to govern. Its ally in government, the Modern Centre Party, which has taken the name of *Concretely*, led by Zdravko Pocivalsek, has joined forces in the *Connect Slovenia* alliance with Marjan Podobnik's People's Party (SLS), the Greens led by Andrej Cus, Zejko Vogrin's New People's Party (NLS) and Andrej Magajna's New Social Democracy (NSD). However, these parties are currently fighting for their survival and do not seem to be able to provide the Democratic Party with the seats it might need to achieve a majority in parliament.

ROBERT GOLOB AND HIS MOVEMENT FOR FREEDOM, THE OUTSIDER

As is often the case in Slovenia in the run-up to a legislative election (Zoran Jankovic (Positive Slovenia, PS) in 2011, Miro Cerar (Miro Cerar Party, SMC), in 2014 and Marjan Sarec (Marjan Sarec List, LMS), in 2018), a new player has emerged on the political scene. Robert Golob, who headed Slovenia's national electricity distribution company, GHen-I, for more than a decade, has taken over *Dej*, an environmentalist party founded in May 2021 by former environment minister Jure Leben, which he has renamed *Movement for Freedom* (GS). ousted from the leadership of GHen-I at the end of 2021, Robert Golob decided on 24 January to launch a legislative campaign. The man is not a novice in politics. He has worked as secretary of state in the Ministry of Economic Affairs. In 2011, he was appointed vice-president of Positive Slovenia (PS), a party founded by Ljubljana mayor Zoran Jankovic, and later he was vice-president of the Alenka Bratusek Alliance.

Robert Golob presents his company as a model of governance and describes his political programme as "a little bit left and a little bit right". The programme focuses on green transition, modernisation of the welfare state and promotion of a free, open society governed by the rule of law. "*The party offers a new social pact that will leave no one behind and that will*

be sustainable," promises the leader of the Freedom Movement.

Climate change policy, health and the health crisis and intergenerational challenges are the three priorities of his party, which advocates Slovenia's move away from fossil fuels and the development of a new generation of nuclear technologies, as well as keeping energy prices low. It also wants to attract green businesses and invest in new technologies, digitise health services and help companies reduce their carbon footprint.

On the institutional front, the Movement for Freedom (GS) would like to see the president of the republic, whose office is essentially honorary in Slovenia, play a greater role. It wants to reform business taxes, increase the defence budget and dismantle the barrier built on the border with Croatia to prevent illegal crossings by migrants, which it considers ineffective. Robert Golob likes to point out that he deliberately chose the term "movement" rather than "party" "*because I want to show that we are not an ordinary party, we are different*" adding "*We are not offering a programme but a vision of the country, a vision of what Slovenia will be in 2030*".

The GS is expected to attract former Liberal Democracy (LDS) voters, including those who have joined other parties. Robert Golob has indicated that he will not make any alliances before the election. For many political analysts, the Freedom Movement and the left-wing opposition parties are not expected to lose the 24 April vote.

AN OPPOSITION UNITED IN A COALITION "ALL AGAINST JANSA"

Following the example of the Czech Republic, the Slovenian opposition has united in a coalition called the Constitutional Arc Coalition (KUL). It rallies the Social Democrats (SD) led by Tanja Fajon, the Marjan Sarec List (LMS), the Party of Alenka Bratusek (SAB) and The Left (L) led by Luka Mesec.

The main objective of these 4 parties is to bring down Janez Jansa. They signed a cooperation agreement on 28 September 2021 with a view to forming a government if they win the elections. It was decided that the post of Prime Minister would go to the leader of the party with the highest number of votes. The

Slovenian opposition accuses the outgoing Prime Minister of undermining democracy, disrespecting the rule of law and trying to control the media.

"The war in Ukraine is the last warning, the proof of what happens when democracy, the rule of law and human rights are being disrespected (...). We see the emergence of an autocratic leadership in Hungary, in Poland, emulated by Prime Minister Janez Jansa", said Social Democrat leader Tanja Fajon, adding *"The attack on media freedom, the production of false information, the return to the past and the models of a conservative society can lead to the division of the nation and hatred"*. The Social Democrats want a reduction in working hours to 32 hours per week and an increase in the minimum wage (from €750 to €800) and the pension (from €654 to €700). They promise to invest €700 million to stimulate the economy and to raise spending on R&D and innovation and support for young researchers to 1.5% of GDP.

The Left has a similar programme. It wants to strengthen state control over the banking sector, increase investment in science, research and education until spending in these three sectors reaches 2% of GDP. It wants to reduce working hours and increase the minimum wage to €1,000 in the next four years. Finally, the party is in favour of demilitarisation and Slovenia's withdrawal from NATO. Asked why the Constitutional Arc Coalition should work when these parties previously did not agree, Luka Mesec, leader of The Left, points to the fact that these parties have learned to cooperate by being in opposition.

However, the Constitutional Arc Coalition fears that Robert Golob's Freedom Movement will take votes away from it. Both parties agree on one thing: no alliance with Janez Jansa.

THE SLOVENIAN POLITICAL SYSTEM

Slovenia has a bicameral Parliament. The lower house, Drzavni Zbor (Assembly), has 90 members, elected every 4 years by proportional representation. The Constitution guarantees a seat to the 2 minorities (Italian and Hungarian) that are acknowledged in the country. Their

deputies are elected in two constituencies (Koper and Lendava).

The Drzavni Svet (National Council), the upper house, is appointed every 5 years by indirect suffrage and comprises 40 members: 18 representatives of professional and socio-economic sectors (4 for employers, 4 for employees, 4 for farmers, small entrepreneurs and self-employed and 6 for non-profit organisations) and 22 persons representing local interests. The role of the National Council is only advisory.

For the general elections, Slovenia is divided into 88 constituencies. Lists of candidates submitted by parties need the support of 3 members of the Assembly and 100 voters; those submitted by a group of voters need the signatures of 1000 voters in the constituency in which they are running in order to be allowed to stand for election. Finally, political parties must present at least 35% of women candidates. Lists with only three candidates must include at least one man and one woman. Voting is by proportional representation and preferential voting (the voter can indicate his or her preferences by ranking the candidates on the list). A first distribution of seats is made at the constituency level using the Droop quota (the number of votes cast in a constituency, all lists combined, is divided by the number of MPs elected in that constituency + 1). The remaining seats are distributed nationally according to the d'Hondt method, with MPs selected from the lists with the highest remainders.

Political parties need at least 4% of the vote to be represented in Drzavni Zbor. Sometimes a constituency elects more than one MP, but some constituencies elect no MPs at all, which in the 13 July 2014 elections was the case in 21 of the country's 88 constituencies.

Minority MPs are elected on a first past the post basis. Candidates for this position must be supported by at least 30 voters.

9 political parties won seats in the elections on 3 June 2018:

- the Democratic Party (SDS), a liberal party created in 1989 and led by the outgoing head of government, Janez Jansa, has 25 seats;
- the Marjan Sarec List (LMS), a populist party founded in 2014 and led by Marjan Sarec, has 13 seats;

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- the Social Democrats (SD), founded in 1993 and originating from the former Communist Party (PCS). Led by Tanja Fajon, the party has 10 seats;
- The Modern Party of the Centre (SMC), founded in 2014 and now Concretely (K), is led by Zdravko Pocivalsek and has 10 MPs;
- The Left (L), a party established in 2017, led by Luka Mesec, has 9 seats;
- New Slovenia (NSi), founded in 2000 and led since January 2018 by Matej Tonin, has 7 MPs
- Alenka Bratusek Alliance (ZaAB), a centrist party created in 2014 from a split of Positive Slovenia (PS) and led by former Prime Minister (2013-2014) Alenka Bratusek. Now the Party of Alenka Bratusek (SAB), it has 5 seats;

- the Democratic Party of Pensioners (DeSUS), founded in 1991 from an association of the city of Maribor and chaired by Ljubo Jasnica, has 5 seats;
- the National Party (SNS), a nationalist party led by Zmago Jelincic, has 4 seats.

In Slovenia, the President of the Republic is elected by direct universal suffrage. His term of office is 5 years. On 12 November 2017, the outgoing head of state Borut Pahor (SD) was re-elected to his post with 52.98% of the vote. He defeated Marjan Sarec, who obtained 47.02% of the vote. The turnout was the lowest ever recorded since the country's independence in 1991: 41.84%.

Reminder of the results of the general elections of 3 June 2018 in Slovenia

Turnout:52.63%

Parties	Number of votes won	% of votes cast	No. of seats
Democratic Party (SDS)	222 042	24,92	25
Marjan Sarec List (LMS)	112 250	12,60	13
Social Democrats (SD)	88 524	9,93	10
Modern Centre Party (SMC)	86 868	9,75	10
The Left (L)	83 108	9,33	9
New Slovenia (NSi)	63 792	7,16	7
Alenka Bratusek Alliance (ZaAB)	45 492	5,11	5
Democratic Party of Pensioners (DeSUS)	43 889	4,93	5
National Party (SNS)	37182	4,17	4
Others	107 947	12,10	0
Minorities			2

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