

SLOVAK GOVERNMENT LOSES MAJORITY AFTER COALITION SPLIT

Implications of the coalition break-up, the country's new minority government & possible scenarios

6 September 2022

Issues & Sectors	Political Stability
Stakeholders	Parliament of Slovakia, Government of Slovakia

Following months of personal disputes and policy disagreements between the leading figures of Slovakia's four ruling parties, the country's government has lost its majority support in parliament after the minor ruling liberal Freedom and Solidarity Party (SaS) of now former Economy Minister Richard Sulík departed the coalition and moved into opposition. The SaS' departure comes after Slovak Prime Minister Eduard Heger refused an SaS ultimatum to dismiss Finance Minister (and ex-PM) Igor Matovič, the leader of the major ruling OL'aNO movement.

With the SaS having left the ruling bloc, the Heger Government will now transition into a minority cabinet as the three remaining governing parties – the major ruling OL'aNO, the centre-right Za L'udi and the right-wing Sme Rodina party – fall short of a majority in Slovakia's fragmented parliament. The resigning SaS ministers are expected to be replaced next week.

Below, Aretera provides further insight into the collapse of Slovakia's governing majority and its potential impact on political stability.

This memo will cover:

-  the disagreements leading to the collapse of Slovakia's governing majority,
-  an introduction into the country's diverse political environment,
-  the prospects of a minority government in Slovakia's fragmented parliament,
-  the possibility of snap parliamentary elections.

THE END OF SLOVAKIA'S FOUR-PARTY COALITION

On 5th September, the liberal Freedom and Solidarity Party (SaS) of Economy Minister Richard Sulík, following months of personal disputes and policy disagreements in the governing bloc, announced its departure from Slovakia's centre-right ruling coalition.

Sulík resigned from his position as Economy Minister last week in the wake of tensions within the coalition. This was followed by the subsequent resignations of the remaining SaS ministers: Foreign Affairs Minister Ivan Korčok, Justice Minister Mária Kolíková and Education Minister Branislav Gröhling.

Led by Prime Minister Eduard Heger from the ruling OĽaNO movement, the government will now continue as a minority government, since the remaining three parties of the coalition control only 70 out of 150 MP seats in the National Council, the country's unicameral parliament.

The remaining coalition parties – OĽaNO, the centre-right Za Ľudia and the right-wing Sme Rodina party – have agreed to replace the departing ministers with independent experts. As a next step, PM Heger will discuss potential nominees with the ruling bloc and aim to replace the resigned SaS ministers as early as next week.

A LONG-ANTICIPATED COALITION SPLIT

The SaS' split from the ruling bloc is the result of a long-lasting coalition crisis¹ that involved personal disputes between Finance Minister (and ex-PM) Igor Matovič and Economy Minister Richard Sulík, as well as policy disagreements between Matovič's centre-right OĽaNO movement (also the largest party in the ruling bloc) and the Sulík-led SaS.

In July, then-Economy Minister Sulík told PM Heger that unless he dismissed Matovič from the government before the end of August, SaS would leave the coalition. Behind Sulík's ultimatum was Matovič's often-criticized leadership style, an alleged lack of consultation with coalition partners and OĽaNO's budgetary initiatives, which the financially conservative SaS deemed irresponsible.

On the policy level, tensions between OĽaNO and the SaS were further fuelled by OĽaNO's move to push a controversial government-initiated anti-inflation package through parliament – with opposition from the SaS and the support of far-right MPs.

Standing by his party leader, PM Heger refused the SaS' ultimatum and tried to keep the coalition together with a last-minute policy deal offer that included accepting the SaS' main demand (Matovič's resignation) in exchange for Sulík's party accepting a new anti-inflation package. However, the last-minute talks have failed, subsequently leading to the break-up of the four-party coalition.

Sworn into office in early 2020, the four-party government faced a similarly severe crisis over a controversial purchase of Russian Sputnik V COVID-19 vaccines in 2021. Matovič – as Prime Minister – secured the controversial shipment, drawing scrutiny from the Sulík-led SaS and fellow junior coalition member (and strongly pro-Western) Za Ľudia. The crisis at the time ended with Matovič resigning as PM and switching places with then-Finance Minister Eduard Heger, the current head of government.

¹ See [here](#) for our detailed overview of the coalition crisis from 10 August 2022

THE COMPOSITION OF THE NATIONAL COUNCIL

Party/Alliance	Number of MPs	Affiliation
Movement of Ordinary People and Independent Personalities – OL'aNO (centre-right, socio-populist)*	47	Government
Direction – Slovak Social Democracy – SMER-SSD (social democratic, national-populist)*	27	Opposition
Freedom and Solidarity – SaS (liberal-centrist, pro-European, pro-business)*	20	Opposition
We Are Family – Sme Rodina (right-wing populist, social conservative)*	17	Government
Voice – Social Democracy – Hlas-SD (social democratic, pro-EU, broke away from SMER-SSD in 2020)*	11	Opposition
People's Party – Our Slovakia – L'SNS (far-right, neo-fascist, anti-EU)	7	Opposition
Republic – Republika (far-right, ultranationalist, broke away from the L'SNS in 2021)	5	Opposition
For the People – Za L'udí (conservative-liberal, pro-EU)	4	Government
LIFE – National Party – ZIVOT-NS (Christian democratic, social conservative, broke away from the KDH in 2019)	3	Opposition
Progressive Slovakia – PS (social-liberal, environmentalist, pro-EU)	1	Opposition
Together – Civic Democracy – SPOLU-OD (conservative liberal, environmentalist, pro-EU)	1	Opposition
Independents	4	Support
Independents	3	Opposition
Total	150	

*Given the rules of the Slovak legislature, only OL'aNO, SMER-SD, the SaS, Sme Rodina and Hlas-SD have established parliamentary groups in the National Council.

LOOKING AHEAD IN AN UNCERTAIN POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT

The coalition break-up means that the Heger Government will transition into a minority cabinet that will be constantly relying on external support in parliament. Following the 2020 parliamentary elections, the Matovič Government was sworn into office with a close-to-constitutional majority of 95 MPs, while the current governing bloc holds only 70 MP seats in parliament, falling six seats short of a simple majority.

In addition to the SaS' resignation from government and the recent departure of certain ruling party MPs, the coalition had been further weakened by an internal party struggle for power that eventually led to the split of the junior coalition Za L'udi party last year.

The three-party ruling bloc will now aim for brokering political deals to ensure the smooth passing of upcoming legislation in Slovakia's highly fragmented parliament. This will likely include bills to curb inflation pressure on Slovakian citizens and subsidies to counter the impact of Europe's deepening energy crisis. However, these efforts will require tactical alliances with parties and MPs on the other side of the aisle, including but not limited to defected coalition MPs, lawmakers from the Slovak far-right and the departed SaS.

The SaS has vowed to move into "constructive but tough opposition." Despite its departure from the coalition, the party remains heavily opposed to the leading parties of the opposition side – the centre-right Hlas-SD party of former PM Peter Pellegrini and the centre-left-turned-populist SMER-SSD party of longtime ex-PM Robert Fico (from which Hlas-SD broke away in 2020). The longtime rule of SMER-SSD was broken by OL'aNO's electoral victory in 2020 and its then alliance with the rest of the Slovak centre-right which united against Fico's party on an anti-corruption platform due to allegations of connections between Slovak organized crime and the previous, SMER-led governments.

However, as the economic climate in Slovakia worsens and Europe's energy crisis deepens, accelerating political tensions, a perceived lack of government stability and a governmental failure to mitigate the current crisis could all result in a no-confidence vote against Heger's cabinet and, consequently, snap parliamentary elections will now constantly loom over the government. PM Heger said the government itself will opt for early elections if it is unable to push legislation through parliament. Most opposition parties are now calling for a vote of confidence to make it clear what level of support Heger's minority government will enjoy, however such a vote could also lead to the government's collapse.

In addition to other, smaller opposition formations, SMER-SSD and Hlas-SD are leading the calls for early elections. Current polls show that support for the major ruling OL'aNO and the fellow coalition member Sme Rodina are both below double digits, while support for the minor ruling Za L'udi has faded. Simultaneously, the Pellegrini-led Hlas-SD, which polls around 18-20%, stands good chances of coming in first if parliamentary elections were held in the near term.

Taking Slovakia's multi-party politics into account, a snap parliamentary vote could potentially lead to an electoral victory of Hlas-SD and a coalition led by Pellegrini's party, while it could also mean a hung parliament that would bring further political instability.

###

If you would like to schedule a discussion of this paper, please contact:
[Dominik Istrate](mailto:d.istrate@areterapa.com), Advisor for Central and Eastern Europe at **d.istrate@areterapa.com**



Aretera is a leading independent public affairs advisory firm operating across Central & Eastern Europe, Ukraine, Turkey, Central Asia and a growing number of global emerging markets. We advise a wide range of leading multi-national corporations, providing counsel on all aspects of public policy, public affairs and reputation management. Aretera works to the highest international standards of transparency and compliance, partnering with global and local client teams, lawyers and global agencies, to serve our clients' needs in our regions.

www.areterapa.com