

# POST-ELECTION SLOVAKIA

## THE FIRST HALF-YEAR OF THE CENTER-RIGHT GOVERNMENT

*Grigorij Mesežnikov*

The year 2010 was full of significant events in Slovakia. The citizens decided about the new government for the upcoming four years, about the quality of relationship with its southern neighbor Hungary, the trends in relationships between the majority Slovak population and minority groups, especially ethnic Hungarians, and how the Slovak Republic should act as a member state of EU in deciding on participation in the eurozone bailout. It was the year of complicated decisions for both citizens and politicians.

### RESULTS AND CONTEXT OF THE 2010 SLOVAK PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS

In the year 2010 there was a major political power shift in the country. After the parliamentary elections in June, the new ruling coalition has been formed, having an absolute majority of mandates in parliament (79 out of 150). Four parties have created the coalition, two of which had had seats in parliament in 2006-2010 term as opposition parties (Slovak Democratic and Christian Union, SDKÚ-DS and Christian Democratic Movement, KDH), one party (Most-Híd, Bridge) was created by fragmentation of another opposition parliamentary party (Party of Hungarian Coalition, SMK), and one party was founded in 2009 as a brand new political formation (Freedom and Solidarity, SaS).

The fundamental agreement regarding the formation of the new ruling coalition has been reached by the representatives of the four center-right parties SDKÚ-DS, SaS, KDH and Most-Híd virtually instantly after the announcement of the election results. For confirmation of the solidity



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and constancy of this position the leading representatives of these parties have unanimously refused not only to negotiate with Smer-Social Democracy party (Smer-SD, Direction) about possible coalition cooperation, but also just to meet with its delegates. The reasons for this refusal have not been only program- and ideology-based differences between Smer-SD and center-right parties. The reasons have been much deeper, having origins in previous election terms: an unacceptable authoritarian attitude of Smer-SD to execution of power, attempts of this party to de-legitimize and criminalize center-right opposition parties and their representatives in the years

2006-2010, the conflictual-type-personality

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of Robert Fico, who has been oriented on a constant evocation of political confrontations and last but not least the incriminating, suspicious background behind creation and activities of Smer-SD. This party was actually founded as a power-political project of certain entrepreneurs with unclear, dubious financing, which during its administration was building a system, based on party cronyism, creating spawn for corruption. Possible coalition alliance with Smer-SD, therefore, might have been discrediting for the center-right parties.

For many citizens of SR four years of nationalist-populist government of Smer-SD, SNS and ĽS-HZDS led by Fico had symbolized an era of arrogance of power, breaching of the basic rules of law, deepening of the state debt, confrontational anti-minorities politics and primitive aggressive nationalism. The election confirmed that this politics had been disliked by a substantial part of the society, and even the good share of the popular vote for Smer-SD, which has been forced to step down, has not changed anything about it. Four years of Smer-SD government have clearly shown that this party had never been a standard social-democratic formation, for which it has been presenting itself. It is a political project, based on personal power ambitions of Fico, former deputy of the post-communist Party of the Democratic Left (SDL), and economic interests of a narrow group of entrepreneurs, who had become wealthy during Vladimír Mečiar's era thanks to the wild privatization and generous state orders. It has always been, in fact, a typical populist formation,

whose ideological quintessence has been the combination of etatist rhetoric in the form of declaring “strong social (welfare) state” and an old-fashioned ethnic nationalism, presenting defense of “national state” interests and resistance to “Great Hungary’s politics”.

Table 1

**Results of parliamentary elections in Slovakia,  
June 12, 2010**

<b>Party</b>	<b>Total ballots cast</b>	<b>Share of the popular vote (%)</b>	<b>Seats in parliament</b>
European Democratic Party (EDS)	10,332	0.40	—
Union – Party for Slovakia (Únia)	17,741	0.70	—
Party of Romani Coalition (SRK)	6,947	0.27	—
Paliho Kapurková	14,576	0.57	—
Freedom and Solidarity (SaS)	307,287	12.14	22
Party of Democratic Left (SDL)	61,137	2.41	—
Party of Hungarian Coalition (SMK)	109,638	4.33	—
People’s Party – Movement for a Democratic Slovakia (LS-HZDS)	109,480	4.32	—
Communist Party of Slovakia (KSS)	21,104	0.83	—
Slovak National Party (SNS)	128,490	5.07	9
New Democracy (ND)	7,962	0.31	—
Association of Slovak Workers (ZRS)	6,196	0.24	—
Christian Democratic Movement (KDH)	215,755	8.52	15
People’s Party Our Slovakia (LSNS)	33,724	1.33	—
Slovak Democratic and Christian Union – Democratic Party (SDKÚ-DS)	390,042	15.42	28
AZEN – Alliance for Europe of Nations	3,325	0.13	—
Smer – Social Democracy (Smer-SD)	880,111	34.79	62
Most–Híd [Bridge]	205,538	8.12	14

Source: Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic, 2010

**PROGRAM BASIS AND ACTIVITY  
OF THE NEW GOVERNMENT**

In the beginning of July 2010, several days after the signing of a new coalition agreement between four center-right parties, president Ivan Gašparovič appointed Iveta Radičová, deputy chairperson and election leader of SDKÚ-DS, as Prime Minister of the government. For the first time in the history of the country, the highest government position has been assigned to a woman, for the first time

since the fall of the communist regime in 1989, there is not a single person in the Slovak government, who would have been a former member of the Communist Party (in Fico's government there were ten such people out of 16). These two facts have also shown the nature of change that 2010 parliamentary election has brought to Slovakia.

The program of the new government, approved by the parliament in August 2010, contains a set of measures aimed at expanding the space for free market economy mechanisms, strengthening the democratic character of

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the state, keeping the institutions of public power stable and functioning, strengthening the genuine independence of judiciary and increasing transparency in public life. The new government has unequivocally taken over the political legacy of the second government of Mikuláš Dzurinda from 2002-2006 electoral term, when that conservative-liberal cabinet had implemented the series of deep structural, especially social-economic, reforms. Those, in return, had transformed Slovakia to the Central-European "reform tiger", with their top accomplishment, integrating the country into EU and NATO. After four years of nationalist leftist government led by Fico, that had been promoting the model of "strong social state" and had been trying to amend some of Dzurinda's reforms, the exceptional position of Slovakia as a successful transforming country became history.

After the first six-month of the new government, some changes in several areas are worth noticing. The main slogans of the new politics have become consolidation of public finances, increase in the transparency in public life, fight with corruption and cronyism, restoring the feel of justice and trust of citizens towards the state. The atmosphere in the society has changed quickly. The tension in Slovak-Hungarian relations has decreased, both inter-ethnic and inter-state. Radical nationalist discourse, which had been fed for several years by nationalist SNS with an active assistance of Smer-SD, has perished almost completely. Also those aggressive attacks on independent media and NGOs that Fico's government had been regularly practicing have vanished into history.

## **GOVERNMENT PRIORITIES: TRANSPARENCY AND CONSOLIDATION OF THE ECONOMY**

In the very initial period of its administration, the new government has focused not only on the implementation of its program declaration, but also on summarizing the current state of affairs, which Fico's cabinet had bequeathed. It was important to elucidate to the general public the real results of "building of the social state" in the version of Smer-SD, which thanks to the compelling "social" rhetoric has been persistently disposing with the high support from the general public. Ministers of Radičová's cabinet have released information about the cronyist or openly corrupt background of many previous government's projects, about suspicious, non-transparent circumstances of public procurement and about numerous cases of uneconomical treatment with state resources. It has been referring to several ministries – Defense, Labor, Social Affairs and Family, Transportation, Economy, Culture, Education, Foreign Affairs, Justice, and Finance. In some cases, criminal charges have been filed to the prosecutor's office for the suspicion of offence. In these cases the investigation has begun. Unprecedented release of information about misuse by the former government representatives with strong, in some cases, even macroeconomic impact, has been significant in two aspects: first, the new government's commitment to fight with corruption and cronyism, and second, the depth and extent of cronyism and corruption achieved in the previous election term.

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The new government virtually immediately after its onset has begun to realize the program of increasing transparency and strengthening control in handling the public resources. Here its effort has had a concrete, tangible form. Central register of contracts has been made available on the internet to the general public after parliament had approved the distinct novel of Civil Code. These contracts were signed by state organs in purchasing of goods and services.

As Slovakia's economy is feeling negative impacts of global economy crisis as well as impacts of problematic social-economical politics of the former government, the cabinet

of Radičová has concentrated its efforts first and foremost on public finances stabilization. It has managed to pass the collection of austerity economical measures, aimed at decreasing the state budget deficit. Whereas during Fico's cabinet this deficit had increased from three per cent in 2006 to almost eight per cent in 2010, Radičová's cabinet has planned its decrease to less than five per cent in 2011. Although current coalition parties had promised before the elections not to increase taxes, after revelation of the real state of the state budget and after a long discussion they have made one exception – to temporarily increase the value added tax (VAT) about one per cent – from former 19 to 20 per cent. Increased VAT, however, would have been valid only during the time, when the state budget deficit would have exceeded three per cent, as soon as the deficit would have been less, the original tariff of VAT would be restored.

### **CORRECTION OF FICO'S DEFORMATIONS**

There has been recently some progress in stabilizing the political democracy, the institutions of the constitutional system and the principles of rule of law. In an era of pursuing the methods of "tyranny of the majority", the coalition of Smer-SD, SNS and ĽS-HZDS had openly marginalized opposition parties in parliament, making its MPs mere political extras, had weakened the controlling function of parliament and had negatively influenced the quality of legislation. In contrast, the new majority has been pursuing its will in parliament without breaching the principles of procedural consensus and has not been jeopardizing the parliament's basic functions. Proposals and remarks of opposition MPs have not been a priori rejected only because they have been made by opposition delegates. Despite the conflicting relations between opposition and ruling coalition, the opposition is not marginalized in parliament, whereas the new coalition as a whole as well as its individual parties are set to negotiate and accept legitimate request from opposition.

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The new government has developed a remarkable effort in order to correct legislative and political deformations inherited by Fico's government. In the legislation area, it

has involved mainly laws related to the status of minority groups, even though the correction has been up until now rather partial. For instance, parliament has passed the amendment of State Language Act, which softened several regulations of the amendment of this same law adopted during Fico's rule which had had distinctly restrictive character towards the rights of minority groups' members to use their mother tongue. The new amendment, however, has kept the most controversial regulation –

– fines for breaching the law, even though it has canceled its mandatory character and has lowered the limits of fines. The case of the amendment of a State Language Act is an illustrative example of how complicated

the restoration to the original state is that

had existed before inappropriate legislative changes. Although some problematic regulations of the amendment adopted during Fico's rule have been finally removed, the overall status from the perspective of execution of rights of minority groups' members to use their mother tongue today is still worse than before amendments initiated by Fico's ruling coalition.

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Also the amendment of the State Citizenship Act has been submitted to parliament. In case of being passed, it would eliminate the possibility to be involuntary deprived of the Slovak citizenship for those citizens of Slovakia who acquired the citizenship of a foreign state. With this legislation Fico's government in summer 2010 reacted to the amendment of a State Citizenship Act passed by the Hungarian parliament. The proposal for the Hungarian amendment was made by the ruling party Fidesz. The amendment of Radičová's cabinet should have annulled the validity of the Hungarian law on the Slovakia's territory and should have revoked the fees for not informing the authorities about acquiring of foreign state citizenship introduced by Fico's government. Alongside the positive effect on inter-ethnic relations in Slovakia and status of members of Hungarian minority, the aforementioned amendment might, in case of being passed, contribute to the continuing improvement of bilateral relationship between Slovakia and Hungary.

## **RULING COALITION VS. OPPOSITION: SHOWDOWN**

The situation in the new ruling coalition was relatively stable in the second half of 2010. No serious conflicts were registered. Relations between the ruling parties were well-balanced, no party aspired for dominance. Although the leader of opposition Fico was continuously repeating that the ruling coalition was in fact zlepenec (an-organic glued-together bunch of things), held together only by the desire of power, in reality the program-based accordance of the four parties in the fundamental issues of practical politics proved to be a very strong bond, which made it possible to pass 53 laws and amendments of laws in parliament during four months from August to December 2010 virtually without any hesitations.

Due to the inexperience of some political newcomers, especially from the SaS party, information about complicated negotiations on reaching a coalition consensus sometimes was leaked into the media before an agreement had been reached. This was making an impression as if there was a chaos in coalition. After reaching the principle agreement about support of submitted legislation proposals, however, these were then passed smoothly in parliament. The only exception was the amendment of the excise tax on beer, when four MPs from KDH, surprisingly even to their own party, abstained during the voting. The amendment thus was not passed. Coalition cooperation, however, was not weakened by this minute hesitation.

The special case has been the situation within SDKÚ-DS and relations between Iveta Radičová, Prime Minister and deputy of this party, and Mikuláš Dzurinda, chairman of the party and Minister of Foreign Affairs. After both of them have become members of the new cabinet, considerations and speculations have started to arise as to whether it would have caused "sparkling"

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between two politicians and whether the different mutual subordination, one inside the party and another inside the government, would have led to tension and conflicts. Nothing of that kind, however, has occurred yet. Radičová has been repeatedly emphasizing that she has not been having any ambitions to become the chairperson of the

party at this time and that she is fully supporting Dzurinda in remaining in his post. Dzurinda, reciprocally, has been continuously repeating that from his position of chairman he is unconditionally supporting Radičová as Prime Minister and that by doing so he is also expressing the position of the entire party. Fico, though, claims that Radičová is a weak prime minister in comparison to himself during 2006-2010 electoral term, since she is not chairperson of her party as he has been. However the reality is quite different. In certain situations Radičová has shown to her coalition partners from SaS, KDH and Most-Híd and to the members of the government that she has taken full responsibility for being Prime Minister with all the competences that go with it. She has been using these competences in such a way that no one has had doubts as to who is being the leader of coalition and government. She has several times sharply revised ministers of her government when deciding about concrete measures, and with no regard to these revisions being always well justified, she has demonstrated her strong political position very clearly.

Alongside the program-based accord among the current coalition parties, there has been another strong bond within the ruling coalition: the existence Smer-SD, the common political rival with strong power-based ambitions. The profile of this party and the results of its rule are well known to the current ruling parties. All of the center-right formations concordantly continue to refuse any possible coalition cooperation with Smer-SD. They also realize very well that any kind of enfeeblement in their unity would play out well for Fico who believes in effectiveness of his own populist promises, being compelling to his voters, and in case of some turbulences within ruling coalition he would rely on his important ally – President Gašparovič who was elected in 2009 with support of Smer-SD and until now was always loyal to this party.

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Since Fico's initial expectations that the ruling coalition in its current composition will not be able to last long have not been fulfilled, the opposition leader has changed rhetoric and started to openly express his preparedness to create a "big coalition" with center-right parties, including SDKÚ-DS. Despite the fact that SDKÚ-DS has adopted

the provision about refusal of coalition cooperation with Smer-SD on its last congress in December 2010, it did not discourage him from making such announcements, whereas SDKÚ-DS chairman Dzurinda has labeled this party as "a bunch of corrupted communists".

Nobody in the current ruling coalition, obviously, is ready to offer coalition cooperation to Smer-SD, so all of Fico's talks about a "big right-left coalition" are a mere bluff. The only intention of these talks is to create an illusion that Smer-SD is a standard program-based party with a wide coalition potential. It has been shown that nationalist and populist excesses of Smer-SD as a ruling party has decreased its potential to make coalition alliances with program-moderate parties to such an extent, that its only potential coalition allies might have been parties like Mečiar's authoritarian ĽS-HZDS or Slota's radical-nationalist SNS, with whom Fico had ruled during 2006-2010 electoral term. Mečiar's party, however, did not reach five per cent threshold to get into parliament and SNS is fighting for political survival on the background of harsh intra-party conflicts and considerable drop in voters' preferences almost under five per cent threshold. Fico's Smer-SD thus is jeopardized to stay alone in opposition also after the elections in 2014.

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#### **THE ELECTION OF A PROSECUTOR GENERAL: COALITION ON THE EDGE OF DOWNFALL**

Efficient politics of the new government, especially the smooth passing of the laws in parliament, obviously does not necessarily mean that the center-right coalition is not exposed to real problems in its inner functioning. The test of coalition unity was the problematic prosecutor general's election in parliament in December 2010. It was, from the political point of view, an exceptionally significant case, when quite unexpectedly and to the big surprise of the new ruling coalition itself, the new cabinet came near its own collapse due to the result of the election.

The electoral term for the incumbent general prosecutor Dobroslav Trnka expired in February 2011. According to the Constitution, the prosecutor general is to be elected

in parliament, then to be sworn in by the president. Due to the differences between ruling coalition and opposition, but also due to differing stances of ruling parties among themselves about a candidate (ruling parties had proposed two candidates at first) the prosecutor had not been elected in parliament in the first round. He has not been elected in the second round either, when ruling coalition has proposed only one common candidate and parliamentary opposition has pursued the reelection of the incumbent prosecutor general Trnka, whereas for the successful reelection in the ballot only one more vote has been needed. The results of the ballot have revealed that at least six ruling coalition MPs voted for the opposition candidate, whereas no delegates of ruling parties neither before, nor after the ballot have publicly presented the support for Trnka.

Unexpected result of the ballot was even more startling, since Prime Minister Radičová publicly declared before the election that she would have resigned if prosecutor general Trnka had been reelected – which according to the Constitution automatically means resignation of the entire government. Trnka's remaining in the post for another electoral term would be according to Radičová in contradiction with the commitment to bring principal changes to judiciary. According to the Prime Minister, the incumbent prosecutor general who had demonstrated passivity in investigation of certain politically sensitive cases (or sometimes, conversely, had actively contributed to mar the investigation), cannot be the symbol of change. The fact, that only one more vote was needed for the reelection of Trnka during the second round of the ballot has shown that without any obvious political reasons, without the intra-coalition crisis, only due to some hidden internal political manipulations, the government of Radičová and the new ruling coalition could have ceased its existence.

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Hardly anyone had doubted before the election that Radičová would fulfill her promise to resign in case of Trnka having been reelected. If that was the case after all, the probability of forming a four parties' center-right coalition would be slim at best. Smer-SD leader Fico would have certainly played the political game with his loyal ally,

President Gašparovič, goal of which would have been the gradual return to power, in certain circumstances also via premature elections.

Fico was, however, washing his hands during impatient expectation of such a development little prematurely. After

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the announcement of the results of the ballot he allegedly blanched. Probably on the basis of clandestine internal information, he had been calculating with Radičová's resignation.

That did not happen. The ruling coalition's failure, however, paradoxically, has not undermined its unity. Conversely, it has created an even stronger bond. It has led the coalition to the decision to change the election method and introduce the public voting instead of the secret one. Although this decision has created various reactions (opposition subjected it to harsh criticism), representatives of ruling coalition have been claiming that in parliamentary democracy based on principles of public politics, the principle of public openness in executing the MP's mandate should not have had any exceptions, especially not in electing the public officials. Government representatives have stated that the ballot method should have been without any reservations applicable for citizens in executing their suffrage, but elected representatives of citizens should have been executing their mandate as transparently as possible and information about their voting in laws passing and in electing officials should have been publicly accessible, so that citizens would be able to adequately evaluate the activity of their MPs. As the reaction of opposition having been accusing the ruling coalition that the change in election method to being public is denying the principle of democracy, coalition politicians have stated that introducing public voting in electing officials in parliament does not limit MPs' decision in voting, as well as it does not limit the MPs' public voting in passing laws.

The case of unsuccessful election of the prosecutor general has revealed the real risk of behind-the-scenes machinations with corrupted background. Since the speculations that the decision of the six coalition MPs to support the candidate of opposition could be related to corruption have been expressed by MPs themselves, then in this situation

the change from ballot to public voting may have a positive anticorruption effect. Another potentially positive aspect of the prosecutor general's election may be the intention of ruling coalition to amend his competences and to bring the system of prosecution, built on inorganic – for the liberal democracy – monocratic principle, closer to modern constitutionalism, even though the entire restructuring of the prosecution's system may probably need more time. The positive effect may also be the announced intention to reduce the number of electoral terms for general prosecutor to just one, thus making it less prone to politicizations. This intention would have to be anchored by the law.

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The prosecutor general's election has set the mirror not only to ruling coalition, which possesses some disloyal MPs, but also to parliamentary opposition, viewpoints of which have been confirming that the constitutional framework scope of the liberal democracy seems too narrow. The warning signal that the most powerful opposition party Smer-SD would have been able under certain circumstances to leave the constitutional frame was the announcement of Fico that in case of changing the method of the prosecutor general's election, Smer-SD might proceed in accordance with Article 32 of the Constitution: "The citizens shall have the right to resist anyone who would abolish the democratic order of human rights and freedoms set in this Constitution, if the activities of constitutional authorities and the effective application of legal means are restrained." Announcement of the intention to "activate" the aforementioned Article of the Constitution in the situation, when there is no any "abolishing of the democratic order of human rights and freedoms", but only due to the party's disagreement with submitted proposition for legitimate and legal change of existing legislative standards is raising questions as to what extent is the internal character and overall political constellation of opposition Smer-SD in accordance with values and principles of the liberal democracy.

## LOAN TO GREECE: FICO'S LEGACY TRAPS

One of the most extraordinary steps of the new Slovak government has been a rejection to provide the loan to Greece in terms of European Union mechanism of eurozone bailout. This entire case was the result of several factors playing out, mostly of intra-political character.

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The former government of Fico had promised to approve the loan to Greece, it had even negotiated the conditions with Brussels, but before the elections in June it had hesitated to submit the loan contract to parliament for ratification. It had proceeded quite arrogantly towards the opposition, which had demanded to release its conditions and had insisted on calling a separate parliamentary session. This session was, however, marred by the ruling coalition of Smer-SD, SNS and ĽS-HZDS, since it had the majority in parliament. When the polls showed that the general public had not been supportive in helping Greece, Fico as an authentic populist tried to sweep the whole problem under the carpet in order not to unnecessarily irritate his voters. He had claimed that the new government would have been handling that after the elections. Who knows how things would have wound up if the new government had been consisting of Smer-SD? We will never find out.

After the elections, the government has been composed by four center-right parties, and they rejected the loan for Greece. They did so because during the pre-election race they had put themselves into a big conflict with Smer-SD, which they had accused of not negotiating with the opposition about such a significant issue, hiding the actual conditions of helping Greece from the general public. They further criticised that during negotiations in Brussels, the government had not utilized the opportunity to influence the parameters of eurozone bailout mechanism.

According to the center-right parties, Fico had played the dual role, as an opportunistic extras in Brussels and as a buck passer then in Slovakia. The opposition had promised before elections that, if they managed to take over the power, they would reevaluate the conditions of helping Greece and should they discover, that those conditions

were inconvenient for the country, they would refuse to help. The economy experts of the opposition parties have been showing that Slovakia as a less developed post-communist country with weaker macroeconomic indicators cannot fulfill the role of a donor to a more developed country like Greece. After taking over the power by the center-right parties, the new government has announced that Slovak economy after four years of Fico's populist rule has been in worse state than the opposition had been expecting before elections. The growth of GDP had dramatically dropped in comparison to previous years and had reached negative numbers. The deficit of state budget had risen to almost eight per cent. Except that, the representatives of the new government have claimed that the EU had not taken into consideration all aspects while deciding about the Greek bailout. According to them, Greece had allegedly performed a moral hazard with its public finances in previous years. Radičová's government thus adopted a resolution that the loan to Greece would not have been provided. The government, however, has joined the European Financial Stability Facility.

The cabinet has submitted the Greek loan contract to parliament in August 2010, which Fico had at the very last moment put in the drawer. As expected, the MPs of ruling coalition have rejected the contract (with an exception of one MP of KDH). However, the voting of Smer-SD MPs, which had been accusing the new government of breaching the agreement negotiated by the former government with EU, has been symptomatic. Not a single MP of Smer-SD has voted for this contract: the entire fraction simply not participated in voting.

**Several experts claim that the potential positive economical effect of the decision to refuse to help Greece will be much weaker than the impact of Slovak's deteriorated image.**

The decision of the new government to refuse to help Greece has met with support of the majority of country's population. However, several experts and influential intellectuals have pointed out its problematic sides. They claim that the potential positive economical effect of this decision will be much weaker than the possible negative impact of country's deteriorated image, refraining due to the intra-political reasons from basic principles of solidarity on which EU has been built.

## **WHAT NEXT?**

What are the perspectives for future development? There are indications that in 2011 the new ruling coalition should be able to preserve the degree of internal consolidation it achieved shortly after it took over power and adopted initial practical measures. However, public support for this administration will directly depend on its success in tackling the most pressing social problems and its ability to explain certain unpopular but inevitable measures to citizens.

Smer-SD is a formidable political rival that will undoubtedly use all displays of discontent to undermine the pro-reform government's position and create favorable conditions for its own return to power. But this tactic may not be successful, provided that the new ruling coalition avoids enervating internal conflicts, resists the temptation of cronyism and prefers matter-of-fact solutions aimed at improving socio-economic situation of those citizens the opposition considers its potential voters.

Article current as at 7<sup>th</sup> February 2011.