

ELECTION BRIEFING NO 46 EUROPE AND THE PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS IN SLOVENIA, SEPTEMBER 2008

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Key points:

- The Social Democrats led by Borut Pahor won the elections with lead of just over than 1% over the next largest party, the Slovenian Democratic Party.
- New Slovenia–Christian People’s Party, the second largest governing party during the 2004-2008 parliament, did not pass the 4% threshold to secure election to the National Assembly.
- The Slovenian National Party did not repeat the remarkable result achieved by its leader Jelinčič in the 2007 presidential election.
- The Zares–New Politics party, which was only established in 2007, became the third largest in the National Assembly.
- A large part of election campaign was taken up by the so-called Patria corruption affair.
- As in the case of previous national parliamentary elections in Slovenia, EU issues were almost totally absent from the election and, thus, had no impact on the election results.

Background

The Slovenian Parliament consists of the National Assembly (lower house) and the National Council (upper house). Due to the National Council’s relatively limited powers, the National Assembly is usually referred to as the parliament. The National Assembly has 90 members, including two seats reserved for representatives of the country’s Italian and Hungarian national minorities. In September 2008, the sixth democratic national parliamentary elections were held. When analysing the background to the 2008 parliamentary elections we would like first to stress several (political) events and issues that could be interpreted as providing the prelude to the political changes seen at the elections, while at the end of the background section we would like to expose some characteristics of the two elections (presidential and local), conducted in between 2004 and 2008 national parliamentary elections.

After an unexpectedly convincing win in the October 2004 parliamentary elections¹ by the Slovenian Democratic Party (SDP), which formed a centre-right majority governmental coalition with New Slovenia (NSi), the Slovenian People's Party (SPP) and the Democratic Party of Retired Persons of Slovenia (DPRPS), the main opposition, Liberal Democracy of Slovenia (LDS), became pre-occupied by internal disputes after following its defeat. The party, previously the leading governmental party for twelve years, held its first post-election congress in December 2004 where the incumbent party leader and former prime minister Anton Rop won a vote of confidence. However, yet another extraordinary party congress was held less than a year later when a new party leader, Jelko Kacin, was elected. Then, in January 2007, another party congress was organised with the most important issue being a vote of confidence in the leader. While he won support, at the same time this party congress represented a final turning point in the party's re-organisation since 12 MPs had already left the party by then. Some of them established a new parliamentary group (and subsequently party) called Zares, while others joined the Social Democrats (SD). In fact, the party leader later resigned and, in June 2007 the politically inexperienced Katarina Kresal was elected Liberal Democracy of Slovenia leader. She thus became the first female leader of any Slovenian parliamentary party. On the other hand, the second biggest opposition party, the Social Democrats, opted for the role of constructive opposition. In April 2006, the party signed an agreement called *Partnership for Development*.² In addition, its party leader at the time, Borut Pahor, was mainly functioning in the European arena as an MEP.

The first year of the new government was characterised by the absence of any (serious) opposition to the measures it took. This was partly due to the fact that some of these policy changes were very popular (for example, cutting the prices of notary services by 50%) and partly because of a weakness of the opposition parties. However, already in the second half of 2005 the government encountered some negative reactions in both the public and political arenas. One of the most negatively viewed actions was the relatively broad range of personnel changes made in the public administration, labelled by the Liberal Democracy of Slovenia as a 'tsunami of cadre'. As noted by Fink-Hafner, in addition some of the top managers of otherwise economically successful (but still partly state-owned) companies were also replaced.³ These included the managers of the Mercator chain of retail shops and malls, the Port of Koper, the New Credit Bank Maribor, the Petrol oil company, the Triglav insurance company, and Hit Casinos. At the same time, an important package of socio-economic reforms prepared by so-called 'young neo-liberal economists' was ready for implementation, including increased liberalisation and privatisation of the public sector (especially of the health and school systems), modernisation of the welfare state, and tax reforms including the introduction of a flat-rate tax.

Many political observers stated that, during this first period, the only opposition to the government actually came from trade unions, which were particularly mobilised by the government's ideas of introducing a flat-rate tax along with liberalisation and privatisation of the health and school systems. In November 2005, the four biggest trade unions organised a protest against introduction of the flat-rate tax. Although the organisers had predicted a huge turnout at the protest, 'only' 30,000 attended, largely due to the extremely poor weather conditions. Heavy snow fell several hours before the protest, leading prime minister Janez Janša to make the

¹ See: Alenka Krasovec and Simona Kustic-Lipicer, 'Europe and the Parliamentary Elections in Slovenia, October 2004,' *European Parties Elections and Referendums Network Election Briefing No 18* at http://www.sussex.ac.uk/sei/documents/epern_eb_18_slovenia.pdf.

² This partnership agreement, which was signed by all the parliamentary parties except for Liberal Democracy of Slovenia and the Slovenian National Party, was to provide the framework for co-operation and the harmonisation of key legal projects in the context of economic and social reforms.

³ See: Danica Fink-Hafner, 'Slovenia', *European Journal of Political Research*, Vol. 45 Nos. 7-8, 2006, pp. 1260-1265 (1263).

cynical statement that in the future trade unions should organise their protests during the spring! In any case, the protest appeared to have some effect since the government started to respect the tradition of the social partnership embodied in the Economic-Social Council. As in the past, many reforms that had been prepared (concerning liberalisation of the above-mentioned systems as well as the labour market) were again debated within that framework.

After a year of a peaceful ‘co-habitation’ of prime minister Janša and the President of the Republic Janez Drnovšek⁴ (who, as leader of Liberal Democracy, had previously held the position of prime minister for 10 years), some conflicts also started to emerge between them. Some of this conflict was political, while other aspects opened up the question of the President’s constitutionally defined powers. After heated debates between the President of the Republic Drnovšek and Prime Minister Janša, President Drnovšek established the *Movement for Justice and Development* as a civil society association that introduced new views on politics as reflected in its key goals: to ‘make the world a better place’.⁵ Following these conflicts with Prime minister Janša, President Drnovšek started to actively present his views on domestic and international issues via the Movement’s website as ‘citizen Janez D’. During 2006 and 2007 the President strongly criticised the government and its actions. One of the most visible criticisms was Drnovšek’s statement that the government would be unsuccessful in achieving the subordination of the President, even though it had already subordinated almost all other sub-systems of society. The broader circle of government critics had especially regarded independent and controlling bodies – such as the Ombudsman and the Anti-Corruption Commission - as being under direct or indirect ‘attack’.⁶ Nonetheless, conflict between prime minister Janša or his government and the Presidential office did not cease when a new President Danilo Türk (primarily supported by Social Democrats, but as well by some other parties) was elected at the end of 2007. For example, in the second half of 2008, the President and government clashed over the issue of nominations of new ambassadors.

At this point, however, it is necessary to stress that prime minister Janša's centre-right government was the most stable to have emerged in Slovenia since the 1990 elections. Political parties steadily defected from all the other governments as the legislative term was coming to an end. Janša’s government was the most ideologically homogeneous of any post-1990 Slovenian government. However, this does not mean that there were not certain tensions between the governmental partners. The Democratic Party of Retired Persons, in particular, voted against government proposals more or less frequently. Indeed, on occasions the party leader Karel Erjavec, who held the post of Minister of Defence in the government, had to intervene in order to assure the support of the party’s MPs for the government proposals. Moreover, occasionally the Slovenian People’s Party also had different views from the coalition partners. Bigger tensions between the Slovenian Democratic Party and the Slovenian People’s Party were seen when the question of privatising some of the most important state-owned companies – such as the Triglav insurance company or Telekom Slovenia - was raised. Indeed, after the Slovenian

⁴ Although the President of the Republic is elected in direct elections, which is formally an element of a semi-presidential political system, Slovenia is a parliamentary system where the main focus of political decision-making lies with the government and parliament. The President of the Republic plays a largely representative and ceremonial role, and only enjoys significant powers under extra-ordinary political conditions.

⁵ See: Danica Fink-Hafner, ‘Slovenia’, *European Journal of Political Research*, Vol. 46 Nos 7-8, 2007, pp. 1107-1113 (1111).

⁶ As the centre-right parties won the 2004 parliamentary elections on the basis of (among other issues) promising a tough anti-corruption policy, the new government adopted several bills designed to fight corruption. See: Danica Fink-Hafner, ‘Slovenia’, *European Journal of Political Research*, Vol 47 Nos 7-8, 2008, pp. 1132-1139 (1137). However, some of the government's decisions in this field were regarded as a step backwards in the struggle against corruption; for example, the decision, at the beginning of 2009, to abolish the independent Anti-Corruption Commission and replace it with a commission comprising parliamentarians. See: ‘Slovenia’, 2008, p1137.

People's Party elected a new leader, Bojan Šrot, in November 2007 (just after the presidential elections were held), relations between the two parties worsened. The heart of the matter here was the problem of the so-called "tycoons", namely: Boško Šrot, the director of the Pivovarna Laško enterprise and at the same time in the public best known "tycoon", is at the same time the brother of (at the time) new leader of Slovenian People's Party.

Finally, it has to be stressed that the Janša government recorded some very positive results. Firstly, parliamentary parties including the opposition saw introduction of the euro in January 2007 as an important aim, and this was implemented successfully. The same applies to the country's membership of the Schengen zone, which was realised in December 2007. Similarly, all parties evaluated the EU Presidency held by the Janša government in the first half of 2008 as having been successful. The government also recorded some very good results in macro-economic terms; for example, the low unemployment level and high levels of economic growth. Up until mid-2007 Slovenia had also enjoyed a very low level of inflation. The opposition parties frequently objected that the government had, in this regard, simply enjoyed the fruits of former governments' work. Nevertheless, it seems that, at the end of its term, the government was a 'prisoner' of its macro-economic success and some economists warned of a possible 'Portuguese scenario': a combination of high levels of economic growth and high inflation (in the last part of 2007 and first part of 2008 Slovenia recorded an inflation rate of 5.7 percent, the highest in the eurozone). In circumstances where economic success was continuously emphasised and the inflation rate had started to climb, the trade unions once again started to mobilise the workers, arguing that only managers and company owners had profited from the country's fortunes. In September 2007, the trade unions organised mass demonstrations (with 70,000 people participating) demanded that workers be given a greater share of the profits. In fact, their main appeal was directed at employers' organisations and (paradoxically, given that the government was itself a major employer) they were actually supported by the government's new Minister of Work, Family and Social Affairs! By the end of 2007 public opinion polls indicated, for the first time, that the opposition Social Democrats were the party with the greatest public support.

As already mentioned, in between the 2004 and 2008 national parliamentary elections, local and presidential elections were held in 2006 and 2007 respectively. Three important points emerged from the 2006 local elections. First, one could observe a broad anti-party orientation,⁷ leading to some very good results for the independent candidates. Second, one of the successful candidates was Zoran Janković, former manager of the largest and most economically successful Slovenian companies, who had been replaced by the government in autumn 2005, who won the local elections in Ljubljana. Although there were sixteen candidates for mayor of the capital city, Janković actually won the elections in the first round with 63% of the votes. His convincing victory round came as a surprise since his best known opponent was France Arhar⁸, the first - and highly respected - Governor of the Bank of Slovenia, who was supported by the three governmental parties (the Slovenian Democratic Party, Slovenian People's Party and New Slovenia). At the same time, Mr Janković's list also recorded a victory in the local council election winning 42% of the votes and securing an absolute majority of seats on the Ljubljana municipal council (23 seats compared to 22 for all the other parties). Third, it seems the local election results in Ljubljana at least partly contributed to a change in the government's attitude towards the capital and its local authority. Soon after the local elections, the government decided to change the law regulating the financial aspects of municipalities, which affected Ljubljana the

⁷ See: 'Slovenia', 2007, p. 1111.

⁸ Mr Arhar was a candidate in the 2002 presidential elections but only won a disappointing 7.6 % of votes and did not manage to enter the second round.

most, since it thereby lost EUR 60 million. Mr Janković repeatedly pointed out this apparent injustice.

Presidential elections were held in October/November 2007. At the end of 2006, the incumbent President Drnovšek announced he would not seek a second term (he had cancer and actually died in February 2008). The period between Mr Drnovšek's announcement and the summer of 2007 was characterised by two main developments. Firstly, Lojze Peterle (an MEP and the first prime minister of democratic Slovenia) announced his candidacy almost a year ahead of the presidential elections but was only able to secure the support of centre-right governmental parties in the last few weeks before the elections. Secondly, Borut Pahor (an MEP and leader of the Social Democrats) could not make his mind up whether to run or not and only decided not to do so a few weeks before the elections, proposing Danilo Türk (a Professor at the Law Faculty and previously a high-ranking official – indeed, at one time Deputy Secretary-General - at the United Nations) as a candidate instead. Altogether there were seven candidates but while the centre-right parties only had one candidate (Peterle), the centre-left parties split their support between two: Mitja Gaspari (former Minister of Finance and more recently the former Governor of the Bank of Slovenia), who had the support of Liberal Democracy of Slovenia, and Danilo Türk, who was supported by the Social Democrats, Zares and the governmental Democratic Party of Retired Persons. In the first round (where the turnout was 57.6%), Mr Peterle received 28.7% of the votes, but the narrowness of his victory over the centre-left candidates - Mr Türk defeated Mr Gaspari by 24.5% to 24.1% - came as a surprise. The election also saw a surprisingly good result for Zmago Jelinčič, the leader of the extremist Slovenian National Party (SNP), who secured 19.3% of votes. In the second round (where the turnout was 58.4%), Mr Türk also gained the support of Liberal Democracy and easily defeated Mr Peterle securing 68% of votes.

A referendum (demanded by the National Council) about the amended Act on the Ownership Transformation of Insurance Companies was held simultaneously with the second round of presidential election and 71% of voters came out against the government's proposals. Unlike most other referendum turnouts in Slovenia, the turnout here was relatively 'high' at 58%,⁹ as a consequence of being held at the same time as the presidential election. However, it is possible to observe a connection between the presidential election and referendum results, with an almost complete overlap between the share of vote won by Mr Peterle (supported by three governmental parties) and the proportion of votes in favour of the government's proposals on the privatisation of insurance companies.

Election Campaign

There were several distinctive features of the 2008 parliamentary election campaign. First, the campaign officially started one month before the election date. Generally speaking, the parties did not take any strikingly new approaches. Nevertheless, two points are worth highlighting: (a) in 2008, almost all the parties created special election websites and some were very modern, something not seen in the past; and (b) some parties used door-to-door campaigning as one of their tools more extensively than in the past, which is a rather unusual campaigning tactic for Slovenian elections.

⁹ In contrast, a consultative referendum called by the government on the Act Establishing Provinces held in January 2008 saw a turnout of less than 11 %.

Second, for the first time in Slovenia, the two biggest parties, the Slovenian Democratic Party and the Social Democrats, presented their potential government teams and prime ministerial candidates prior to an election (an unusual thing to do in a proportional electoral system). Naturally enough, the two prime ministerial candidates both were the respective party leaders: Janez Janša and Borut Pahor. The media adapted to (some might say created) these new circumstances as well, and both the public and the biggest commercial TV broadcasters organised, for the first time, head-to-head debates confrontations between the prime ministerial candidates. It was very clear that special attention was being paid to these two parties, while the others remained in their shadow. There were also some open appeals to voters to vote strategically. All in all, such developments created a feeling of Slovenia having a plurality or a majority electoral system, rather than a proportional one.

Third, critics of the Social Democrats, and especially its leader Mr Pahor, frequently noted that it was hard to discern the party's main aims or any concrete that he would follow if he won the elections. One of the main points that he and the leaders of Zares (Gregor Golobič) and Liberal Democracy of Slovenia (Katarina Kresal) repeated in the campaign was the view that the state must withdraw from the social sub-systems it had occupied/controlled during the period of the Janša government, for example: the media, school system, independent control bodies etc. In a way, Mr Pahor found himself in a paradoxical position during the campaign. Traditionally, his political style is acknowledged to have been consensual, but during the campaign he had to state directly that the Social Democrats would definitely not form a coalition with the Slovenian Democratic Party. Leaders of the other two centre-left parties made similar statements, but their political style was, as a rule, publicly acknowledged as being different to that of Mr Pahor. For its party, the Slovenian Democratic Party used the centre-left parties' statements about potential coalition partners to present itself as some kind of 'victim' and as a party that was, indeed, open to co-operation with all the others.

Fourth, in spite of the fact that the three centre-left parties - the Social Democrats, Zares and Liberal Democracy of Slovenia – had presented themselves as partners throughout the campaign, it was only at the very end that they linked together in the so-called 'triplet' as an informal coalition. They even prepared a joint campaign advertisement.

Fifth, just before the elections this 'triplet' received explicit public support from (among others) two very well-known people: former President of the Republic Milan Kučan, and Mr Janković. The Ljubljana mayor even organised meetings with representatives of also these three parties. The main question he posed to them was whether they would return the EUR 60 million to Ljubljana that, as he repeatedly put it, had been 'stolen by Janša's government'. In these circumstances, maybe it was no surprise that the turnout was the highest in the two constituencies that include Ljubljana and its surroundings, and that the Social Democrats only actually won the largest share of the vote in these two constituencies.

Sixth, a large part of electoral campaign was dominated by the so-called Patria corruption affair and '*tajkuni*' (tycoons), leaving other topics almost completely excluded. In 2008, the biggest corruption affair in post-1990 Slovenia broke out following (till now) unproven claims of the bribery of Slovenian officials by the Finnish state-owned company Patria to help finalise the purchase of armoured personnel carriers for the Slovenian army. This political controversy reached its peak during the campaign just three weeks before elections when the Finnish national television station YLE published an investigation implicating several Slovenian civil

servants, and prime minister Janša, in corruption. The Slovenian government and prime minister rejected all of these the accusations and responded that, in the broadcast, the Finnish journalist who accused Janša of corruption had failed to produce any evidence of his claims. The journalist in question argued that the documents on which he based his claims were verified by multiple reliable sources and that they documents would be published when the police investigation into the affair was completed. In the end, the Slovenian government acted in a quite unusual way: the Foreign Ministry sent two diplomatic notes to the Finnish government, calling on the country to enable the disclosure of the documents relating to the investigation in order to shed light on the issue. For its part, the Finnish government kept a neutral stance and its foreign minister answered that they would not intervene against the journalist, as this would violate the freedom of the press. All in all, Janša's government claimed that it was no coincidence that this broadcast was shown just a few weeks before the elections and that the main goal was to damage the government coalition, especially Mr Janša's Slovenian Democratic Party. However, although this affair over-shadowed most of the election campaign there is no evidence that it had actually had any influence on the election results. Some commentators have even claimed that the only impact would have been in lowering turnout, since the voters did not know whom to trust.

Finally, it has to be noted that EU issues were almost totally absent from the election. This has also been the feature of previous national parliamentary elections in Slovenia, especially in the first elections after Slovenia became the full member of the EU in 2004.¹⁰ It is interesting that none of the Eurosceptic or 'Euro-realist' political parties, neither the parliamentary Slovenian National Party, nor any of the non-parliamentary parties that might fall into this category, did not try to raise any EU topics in the campaign. In this respect, there was, for example, no debate about the (non-)success of the Slovenian Presidency to the Council of the EU in the first half of 2008. At the same time, even relations with neighbouring Croatia and disputed issues between the states - which have recently been closely linked with Croatia's accession process to the EU - were not put on the electoral agenda. Consequently, the EU issues had no direct nor indirect impact on the election campaign and results.

Results

Table 1: Quantitative characteristics of the Slovenian party arena (after elections)

	1990	1992	1996	2000	2004	2008
Number of competing parties;	17	25	21	16	20	17
number of independent candidates	0	10	9	7	3	0
Number of parliamentary parties	9	8	7	8	7	7
% of wasted votes	8.0	17.7	11.4	3.8	11.4	7.9
% of votes for the four biggest parliamentary parties	57.4	61.6	72.1	73.7	71.1	76.5
Turnout	83.3	85.8	73.7	70.3	60.6	63.1

Sources: Danica Fink-Hafner, Damjan Lajh and Alenka Krašovec, *Politika na območju nekdanje Jugoslavije*. Ljubljana: Fakulteta za družbene vede, 2005; Danica Fink-Hafner, 'Strankarski sistem v Sloveniji: Od prikrite k transparentni bipolarnosti', in Zoran Lutovac (ed.), *Političke stranke i birači u državama bivše Jugoslavije*, Beograd: Friderich Ebert Stiftung, 2006, pp. 363-384.; authors' calculations (based on Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia 95/2008)

As **Table 1** shows, in the 2008 parliamentary elections (the country's sixth) voter turnout was 63.1%, only a little higher than in 2004. The number of competing parties and independent candidates was the lowest since 1990. Nonetheless, in a formal sense the Slovenian party system

¹⁰ See: 'Europe and the Parliamentary Elections in Slovenia, October 2004'.

remains relatively ‘open’. In addition, Slovenia has a proportional electoral system with a 4% threshold and 8 constituencies. Despite its openness, there has only been a moderate number of new entrants. It seems that the number of parliamentary parties has stabilised at around 7-8.

In **Table 2** we present the results of the 2008 parliamentary elections. Public opinion polls conducted prior to the elections had indicated that two parties (the Slovenian Democratic Party and the Social Democrats) would compete for victory, although it was then impossible to predict the winner. Indeed, the results for the two parties were very close with little more than a 1% difference between them.

Table 2: Percentage of votes and number of seats of Slovenian political parties that exceeded the threshold to enter the National Assembly in 2004 and 2008

	2004		2008	
	%	seats	%	seats
Social Democrats (SD)	10.17	10	30.45	29
Slovenian Democratic Party (SDP)	29.08	29	29.26	28
Zares–New Politics			9.37	9
Democratic Party of Retired Persons of Slovenia (DPRPS)	4.04	4	7.45	7
Slovenian National Party (SNP)	6.27	6	5.40	5
Liberal Democracy of Slovenia (LDS)	22.80	23	5.21	5
Slovenian People's Party (SPP)*	6.82	7	5.21	5
New Slovenia–Christian People's Party (NSi)	9.09	9	3.40	-

* At the 2008 elections the Slovenian People’s Party formed a coalition with the Youth Party of Slovenia.

Sources: National Electoral Commission, <http://volitve.gov.si/dz2004/>; Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia 95/2008

After the elections, the defeated Slovenian Democratic Party expressed some doubts about the results and was publicly astonished by the high level of invalid votes. However, as **Table 3** shows, the number and percentage of invalid votes at the 2008 elections was the lowest in any free and democratic Slovenian. The party formally disagreed with the results at several of Ljubljana's polling stations. The relevant electoral commissions considered the party’s formal appeal concerning these polling stations but formally declared that any such irregularities would not have influenced the election results.

Table 3: Number of votes cast, number of valid votes and percentage of valid votes (1990-2008)

	1990*	1992	1996	2000	2004	2008
Number of votes cast	1,238,189	1,277,604	1,136,211	1,116,218	991,123	1,070,424
Number of invalid votes	109,754	89,226	67,007	36,938	22,351	18,597
Number of valid votes	1,128,435	1,188,378	1,069,204	1,079,280	968,772	1,051,827
% of valid votes	91.1	93.0	94.1	96.7	97.7	98.3

Sources: Alenka Krašovec and Tomaž Boh, ‘Podatki o preteklih volitvah’, in: Danica Fink-Hafner and Tomaž Boh (eds.), *Parlamentarne volitve 2000*, Ljubljana: Fakulteta za družbene vede, 2002, pp. 173-188; Alenka Krašovec, *Volilne študije*: Ljubljana: Fakulteta za družbene vede, 2007; and Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia 95/2008.

* Elections to the Socio-Political Chamber

Returning to the election results, Zares–New Politics, which was only established one year prior to the elections but included some politically experienced people (known particularly from the period of Liberal Democracy of Slovenia governments) fulfilled expectations and played an

important role in the election emerging as the third strongest party. On the other hand, the two centre-right governmental partners recorded the worst results in their history and the second largest government party, New Slovenia, did not even manage to re-enter parliament. As a result, its leader and Minister of Finance, Andrej Bajuk, resigned from his post just a few hours after the unofficial results were released. (At extraordinary party congress in November he was succeeded by the MEP Ljudmila Novak.) The Slovenian People's Party formed an electoral coalition with the non-parliamentary Youth Party of Slovenia but only just crossed the parliamentary threshold. It probably managed to enter parliament also because of its extensive territorial organisations throughout Slovenia (also reflected in its traditionally good results at local elections). It has frequently been observed that had both parties paid for their co-operation with the Slovenian Democratic Party, which was only able to retain its electoral base by exhausting its two coalition partner parties. The fourth coalition partner, the Democratic Party of Retired Persons of Slovenia, recorded by far its best ever result; a significant part of its success was due to the quite effective defence of the interests of its electoral base, which were also often verbally mentioned in its leader's statements. The Slovenian National Party, led by Zmago Jelinčič, achieved a worse result than expected, especially given the pre-election public opinion polls and Mr Jelinčič's impressive showing in the 2007 presidential elections. Probably one reason for the result was the split that emerged within the party at the beginning of 2008 when three party parliamentary deputies defected and established a new party called Lipa. However, internal splits are 'business as usual' for the Slovenian National Party and it still managed to pass the 4% threshold, whereas the newly established Lipa did not (having received just 1.81% of votes). Taking into account all the developments in Liberal Democracy of Slovenia after its defeat in the 2004 elections, the party's disappointing 2008 result cannot be interpreted as any big surprise.

In 2008 a gender quota for the composition of candidate lists was introduced for the first time at national parliamentary elections.¹¹ The formally defined gender quota was 35%, but it has to be achieved step-by-step: at the 2008 elections it was defined as 25% quota. Generally, parliamentary parties have, on average, included fewer women on their candidate lists (33%) than non-parliamentary parties (39.2%). A deeper analysis has to be carried out before we can estimate the effect of this quota, yet it can already be said that the number of women MPs has not increased dramatically in relation to previous elections (from 11 to 12 – the same as in 1992 and 2000 when there were no gender quotas).

The last point to note is the distribution of support among 8 constituencies, namely: after the elections Mr Janša stated publicly that Ljubljana had 'won' the elections over other parts of Slovenia. A detailed analysis shows that he was correct. The Slovenian Democratic Party received the highest percentage of votes in 6 out of 8 constituencies; the Social Democrats won in the other two. These two constituencies mainly encompass the territory of the Ljubljana municipality and its surroundings. Here, the turnout was also the highest in the country (69.5% and 67.3%, respectively).

Conclusion

The 'left triplet' won the elections but was not in a position to form a government alone. At the beginning of November 2008, negotiations to form a new government between the Social

¹¹ A gender quota was first introduced for the 2004 EP elections and also used in the 2006 local elections.

Democrats, Zares, the Liberal Democracy of Slovenia, and the Democratic Party of Retired Persons of Slovenia started. There had been some disputes between the prime minister-designate Mr Pahor and Mr. Erjavec, leader of the Democratic Party of Retired Persons of Slovenia. In fact, there were two stumbling blocks. The first of these was quickly dissolved, namely: there was a question of how to assure better conditions for Slovenian pensioners in the circumstances of the world (and on-coming Slovenian) economic crisis and in the not very promising Slovenian demographic conditions. The second stumbling block between the two potential partners was only removed after further negotiations between Mr Pahor and the leader of the Democratic Party of Retired Persons of Slovenia. The party leader, Karel Erjavec, the Minister of Defence in Mr Janša's government in order to prove there were no irregularities in the Patria affair and that he was not part of it (Mr Erjavec was not mentioned in any accusations made by the Finnish documentary) insisted on continuing in his portfolio. This was unacceptable to Mr Pahor and other coalition partners since they insisted that the Patria affair had to be resolved in a different way. Mr Pahor offered him some other portfolios but Mr Erjavec was not inclined to accept any of them. There were also some conflicts between Mr Erjavec and the Democratic Party of Retired Persons of Slovenia parliamentary caucus over this issue since the latter had insisted that the Ministry of Work, Family and Social Affairs as well as the Ministry of Health – which were offered to the party by Mr Pahor - were more important. Two months after the elections, on 21 November 2008, Mr Pahor's centre-left majority government was endorsed by the National Assembly.

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