

SLOVAKIA: Caputova to appoint expert cabinet months ahead of a pivotal election

- Following the collapse of Eduard Heger's caretaker government, President Zuzana Caputova is expected to appoint an expert cabinet led by the deputy central bank governor Ludovit Odor.
- Odor's government will be tasked to ensure political stability and oversee preparations for the snap parliamentary elections to be held most likely on 30 September.
- The elections could return to power the center-left SMER-SD party, which would mean a shift towards Russia in foreign policy and bring setbacks in tackling corruption at home.

Acting Prime Minister Eduard Heger (The Democrats, D) has been leading a fragile caretaker cabinet since [losing a vote of no confidence](#) in December. The resignation of the agriculture and foreign affairs ministers last week was a final straw that triggered the government's collapse. On 7 May, Heger requested President Zuzana Caputova (independent, linked to Progressive Slovakia, PS) to revoke his mandate.

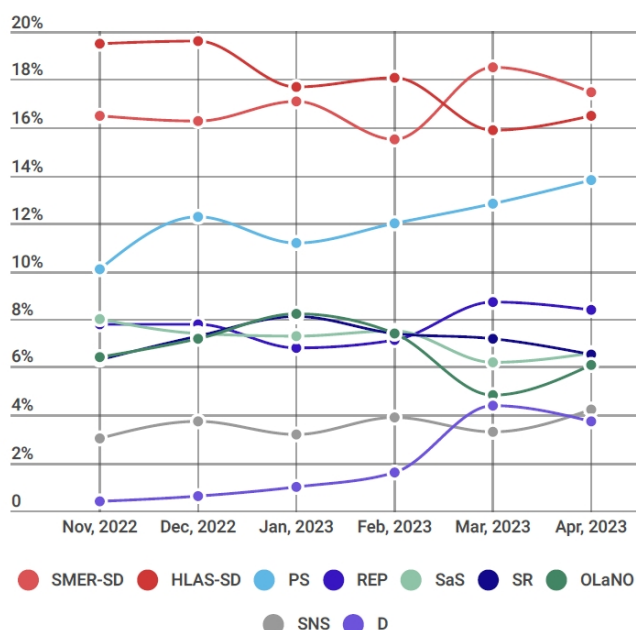
Caputova intends to appoint the deputy governor of the National Bank of Slovakia Ludovit Odor (independent) as Prime Minister in the week of 15 May. While not widely known, Odor is a well-regarded economist holding pro-Western views. The members of his cabinet — expected to be revealed in the coming days as well — will likely consist of independent experts that will not participate in the snap parliamentary elections likely to be held on 30 September.

After the appointment, the new cabinet will have 30 days to present its governing program to parliament and ask for a vote of no-confidence. If the newly appointed cabinet fails to secure absolute majority support in parliament, Caputova could allow it to govern as a caretaker. The main objective of such a cabinet would be to ensure political stability, the effective functioning of the state apparatus, and oversee preparations for the snap parliamentary vote.

Pivotal elections ahead

The elections will likely take place on 30 September despite calls by Robert Fico, former prime minister and the leader of center-left Direction – Slovak Social Democracy (SMER-SD), to hold the vote earlier. However, moving the election date forward requires a constitutional amendment to election laws, for which Fico is unlikely to muster the required three-fifths support in parliament. In addition, an earlier vote might cause various legal and procedural challenges.

Slovakia - average of polls



Fico's push for an earlier election date is partly explained by SMER-SD's lead in the polls and the fragmentation among rivals on the center-right of the political spectrum. In April, SMER-SD was the most popular party with 17.5%, holding a slight advantage against another center-left opposition party Voice – Social Democracy (HLAS-SD) with 16.5%. The liberal PS has been gaining popularity in recent months and comes third with 13.8%, but its appeal is limited outside the capital Bratislava. The far-right Republic stands fourth with 8.4%, followed by three center-right/populist parties that once were part of Heger's coalition government: Freedom and Solidarity (SaS) — 6.6%; We Are Family (SR) — 6.5%; and Ordinary People and Independent Personalities (OLaNO) — 6.1%. After leaving OLaNO in March, Heger has been leading The Democrats (D) party, but it polls below the 5% threshold needed to enter parliament.

While two center-left opposition parties are clear favorites to receive the most votes in September, the outcome of the election is less certain. First, various opinion polls show that more than 40% of those that are planning to vote are not entirely sure of their electoral choice. Factors such as political campaigning, the emergence of new political forces, as well as the perceived performance of the Odor cabinet, will be some of the key factors shaping voter preferences in the coming months. Second, post-election cooperation between SMER-SD and Voice-SD is a likely scenario, but not a foregone conclusion. It cannot be ruled out that Voice-SD will opt for cooperation with centrist or center-right parties instead of a partnership with SMER-SD, whose senior members have been facing allegations of corruption. Finally, even if SMER-SD and Voice-SD agreed on post-election cooperation, they might lack mandates to form a majority cabinet.

If, nonetheless, SMER-SD returns to power, the country's domestic and foreign policies will see major changes. Fico's party would likely seek to overhaul or at least wield greater influence over police and prosecutor's offices, which have been engaged in investigating multiple SMER-SD members. Such moves could trigger mass protests and heighten tensions with Brussels. As in neighboring Hungary or Poland, economic policies could take a nationalist turn, posing various risks to foreign investors. In foreign relations, the country would see a shift toward Moscow, likely halting military supplies to Ukraine.

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