

The EU in the Slovak elections



The unprecedented crisis in the EU has led Slovak political parties to realize that developments in the Union can have a serious impact on their political destiny as well. In spite of this as a campaign topic, Europe remains far from the spotlight, as do many relevant topics.

In what has already become a tradition, EurActiv.sk prepared an analysis of election programs and positions of Slovak political parties ahead of parliamentary elections 2012. Without going into details of the methodology which we explain in the analysis (link indicated below) it is worth noting that we have analyzed the manifestos, semi-structured interviews with leading figures of the respective parties as well as the responses to a structured questionnaire. Further observation in this article will only tackle “relevant parties” – as much as a disputable category as this is.

Grasp of Europe

Most political agendas/topics still deal with the EU in the “Foreign policy” chapter of their manifestos, but European issues are increasingly present in other parts as well. Some EU policy concepts, aims and obligations are widely used, without being explicitly linked to the EU as such (knowledge society, sustainable development, support for SMEs, etc.). Some political parties tend to concentrate on areas where they have some special competence (such as a previous experience gained from relevant ministry): KDH – transport, construction, infrastructure; SaS – culture, defense; SDKU-DS – finances.

Contentious point: the Eurozone crisis

When it comes to the positions of parties on selected issues

we have concentrated on the positions to the biggest policy dossiers, one of them being the debt crisis. All relevant parties support a policy of budget discipline and stricter control by fiscal cooperation (with the exception of SNS). All tend to agree that the survival of Eurozone is in Slovakia’s strategic interest with several nuances. SaS considers the Euro as an advantage only if “changes” are introduced. MOST-HÍD and LS-HZDS consider membership an advantage only if it would not lead to further centralization. KDH, SMK and SNS are ready to support a mechanism that would expel insolvent members.

Relevant parties (except for SNS) support automatic sanctions, with strong supervision of the European institutions (EC or Court of Justice). Eurobonds, however, are still a contentious issue. MOST-HÍD, SMK and LS-HZDS seem to be in favour, while SDKU-DS, SNS, SaS and KDH voice opposition. No position was detected by SMER-SD and Obyčajní ľudia a nezávislé osobnosti.

The incoming government will have to secure the ratification of the permanent Eurozone Rescue Mechanism (ESM). With the exception of SaS and SNS all political topics support the ratification, nevertheless they are reluctant towards its further beef-up.

Taxes – still a red line?

Tax harmonization remains a red line in any form for KDH, SaS, SDKU-DS, SNS, and OL-NO. MOST-HÍD and LS-HZDS would be approve it in the form of a common consolidated corporate tax base, while SMER-SD and the 99% party are in favor of possible tax harmonization including tax rates

Budget well spent

Mentions of the EU Multiannual financial framework for the years 2014-2020 in the election programs are scarce. Despite that we have identified that only SMER-SD would support a financial transaction tax as a source of EU budget, while SDKU-DS is ready to consider it based on a more in-depth analysis. All the other parties are focused only on the expenditure side of the budget framework. The priorities most often mentioned are infrastructure, science and research, regional policy, employment and education, and ICT. SaS would concentrate the expenditures on “deepening of the common market”. Infrastructure is a popular choice as a priority for financing from the European funds as well (KDH, SDKU-DS, SNS, Obyčajní ľudia, SMK), followed by regional development (SMK, SMER-SD), social policy (SNS, culture (SaS), labor market (KDH) and energy policy (KDH, SMK).

Special demands

In the EU context, we have come

across the following special demands by the political parties. SDKU-DS suggests a new post of ByroKAT (bureaucracy – executioner), a new informal institution to control bureaucracy coming from the EU. SaS proposes “innovation vouchers” financed from the EU funds that would support research and innovation cooperation between businesses and universities. MOST-HÍD is the only party to mention the EU Strategy for Roma Integration which it thinks should be implemented properly. KDH demands “strict asylum policy” that should remain in national hands. SNS – in contrast to stances on other EU issues - demands the European coordination of income policy, and an introduction of a “minimal average European price of labor”. The specialty of SMER-SD is that it uses the EU often as an argument for strengthened the role of the State in the economy. Similarly SMER-SD is the only party to mention preparation for the Slovak EU Presidency 2016, which the next government should prepare in its totality. SMK focuses in detail on the ethnic minorities’ policy in the EU context. Despite its election campaign about a rather mysterious “millions approved for the Italian banks”, 99 % claims to support ESM and Eurobonds.

Conclusion

All in all, it is appropriate to say that the European agenda is slowly finding its way to Slovak political discourse. The analysis can be found online (including an English summary) on www.euractiv.sk/fileadmin/images/analyza_SK_preprint.pdf



Zuzana Gabrižová
Editor in Chief
EurActiv.sk