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**The Possibilities and Limits
of Our Future**

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The results of early general election were indeed historical: a clear majority of MP mandates (83 out of 150) went to a single political party – Smer-SD – which means there will be a single-party government. The election results show citizens' great trust in a future shaped predominantly by Smer. Five center-right parties are in the opposition. It is essential that these parties stop endlessly addressing their own internal issues and instead become a strong opposition force from Day 1 of the new electoral period.

At the moment it does not make sense to think about all the factors that led to this distribution of political power. We should look to the future and estimate the opportunities as well as the limits of this situation. I see three important areas to be considered – domestic politics, economy, and European agenda.

Several political scientists have warned that a government formed by a single political party will test the firmness of our democratic institutions. So far, the mutual control of coalition parties has provided checks and balances. Another significant aspect of this single-party government is the fact that Smer is not going to be able to place blame for failures or corruption affairs on the shoulders of smaller coalition partners. However, this does not mean that blame will not be transferred onto other stakeholders.

Slovak justice will be a sensitive and closely scrutinized area. Former Minister Lucia Žitňanská initiated a number of reforms leading to the greater transparency and open character of Slovak courts. However, it is unclear whether the new government will continue in this direction or return to the old status quo. Law enforcement is another long-standing problem that worries Slovakia and hampers its business environment. Smer's election program failed to offer many specific proposals in this respect.

Another sphere to be tackled is budgetary discipline. Smer made a lot of promises before the elections, though now the 'pantry' is empty and there is not much left inside to give away as promised. In fact, saving is more necessary now than ever before. The government of Iveta Radičová attempted to establish some order in public finance, since the fiscal deficit was 7.3% GDP in 2009 (compared to a comfortable 2.3% in 2008). The underlying reason for this sharp rise was not only the economic crisis, but also the irresponsible budgetary policy of Mr. Fico's government at that time.

In the meantime, the eurozone set up fixed rules and strict compliance conditions, including tough sanctions for failing to do so. A collision with the debt crisis is imminent. Trend weekly noted that the mail from Brussels will be tough: "According to the rules, the government will have to cut down €1.2 to 1.8 billion from the budget debt by the end of 2013" (Trend 10/2012, page 12). Today, budgetary discipline is tightly controlled externally by the European Union and internally by the commitments made through a constitutional act. It is clear that Slovakia will only enjoy its credit if it convinces the markets that it can manage its resources competently.

We know that markets can be impartial and merciless in this matter – a country without trust simply will not be able to sell its bonds. Economic development is tightly linked to the quality of the business environment and experts claim that Iveta Radičová's government failed to introduce any major improvements. Changes made to the Labor Code were appreciated the most. However, the ambitious initiative of the Ministry of Economy, also known as "Singapore", succeeded only partially, and many of its components remained unfinished. Slovakia continues to lag behind its V4 neighbors in evaluations of business environment, so there is much work to be done. Based on the logic of ideological positioning, observers would expect right-wing governments to improve in this area, while less is expected from a left-wing cabinet. However, these days such ideological labels are less relevant than before and therefore Smer may actually be a surprise.

Today, Smer presents itself as a strongly pro-European party; the party wants to be a reliable and predictable partner in the EU 27 as well as within the eurozone. Smer voted to support EFSF and will also vote in favor of the EFSM. The European media and politicians also appreciated the pledged pro-European character of the new government. Regardless of the internal motivation, it is good news for Slovakia that its government will be a part of the European mainstream, not only in situations when the discussion concerns benefits, but also when it comes to commitments and obligations. Overall, the new government should be given the chance to convince the country about its competence and capability in these areas and beyond.