

# Slovakia elections: Populist party wins vote but needs allies for coalition

October 1, 2023

Online Desk : A populist pro-Moscow party led by former PM Robert Fico has won Slovakia's parliamentary elections, with almost all votes counted. The Smer-SSD party had a clear lead with almost 24% of the vote despite exit polls suggesting victory by a liberal centrist party. Smer has pledged an immediate end to military support for Ukraine. Mr Fico was forced to step down as PM following the murder of investigative journalist Jan Kuciak in 2018. He will be expected to start coalition talks on forming the next government.

The liberal Progressive Slovakia party, which exit polls suggested had won the election, polled about 17%. The pro-European Hlas party, which could decide who forms the next government, came third with 15%. Former Fico colleague and leftist Hlas leader Peter Pellegrini kept his options open on future coalitions. "The distribution of seats confirms Hlas as a party without which any normally functioning government coalition cannot be put together," Mr Pellegrini said.

Mr Fico may align with Hlas, which split away from Smer in 2020, and the nationalist Slovak National Party that won 5%. There could be as many as 10 parties in the new parliament from libertarians to far-right, which could make the coalition process long and complicated. "If Smer enters government, we will not send a single round of ammunition to Ukraine," Mr Fico recently told supporters. Mr Fico brushes aside the label "pro-Russian politician", but this result will be celebrated in Moscow, and met with alarm in Brussels and Washington.

The threat has led to concerns among European Union and Nato members, while gaining support on social media among Slovaks who traditionally have warm sentiments towards Moscow. Slovakia has been a loyal and steadfast ally to Kyiv, supplying surface-to-air missiles and helicopters and even donating its entire fleet of retired MiG-29 fighter jets. Progressive Slovakia offers a vision of an "open, tolerant, cosmopolitan society" and has advocated following a liberal line within the European Union on issues such as green policies and LGBTQ+ rights. Smer dismisses that vision as "liberal fascism", campaigning on stability, order and social security instead. Mr Fico has also said that he is concerned about the rise in the number of migrants going to western Europe through Slovakia.