



By: Tomorrow's Affairs Staff

The assassination attempt on the Slovakian PM will deepen the already deep divisions in society and political life



The shocking assassination **attempt** on Slovakian PM Robert Fico last Wednesday, from which he has been recovering well, appears to have set aside the country's major political differences.

Initial reactions suggested that the assassination attempt on the prime minister had dramatically crossed the line of regular political struggle and that the deeply polarised political scene was moving towards de-radicalisation.

Zuzana Čaputová, the outgoing president of Slovakia, a liberal and fierce opponent of Prime Minister Fico, condemned the attack in the strongest possible terms, cancelled the planned protests against the new government's policies, and asked for calm.

Politicians from both sides of the Slovakian scene frequently used the word "polarisation" after the attack. It is a correct diagnosis of the long-standing situation in this member state of the EU and NATO, and it is even a partial explanation for the cause of the assassination attempt on the Prime Minister.

Political background

In a leaked video, the arrested assassin, a **local activist** and writer whose name the Slovakian media mentioned, declared that he "did not agree with the policies of this government," particularly with regard to its attempts to restrict the media and the judiciary.

His son confirmed that his father did not vote for Fico and his party, and nothing more than that, while a local acquaintance described the assassin as active in anti-government protests but not at all aggressive.

The investigation will reveal the true motives for the assassination attempt on Prime Minister Fico, but the whole event is already strongly embedded in a political context and will remain so for a long time to come.

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The public has already formed the perception that the political divisions reached their peak with the assassination attempt in the town of Handlova, from which Prime Minister Fico narrowly escaped.

However, the polarisation that many view as the underlying factor will persist and, in reality, appears to be intensifying as time progresses.

Robert Fico's political allies already indicated this very clearly in the first hours after the assassination.

"We are on the brink of civil war", said Šutaj Eštok, Minister of Interior, immediately after the assassination, and he called on the public, politicians, and media to "stop spreading hatred".

Political war

While Minister Eštok has shown a commendable effort to avoid intensifying emotions following the tragedy, other coalition colleagues have acted in direct contrast.

"A political war is starting", said Andrej Danko, leader of the ultra-nationalist SNS party and Fico's coalition partner.

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members following the news of the murder, and said, "This is your doing".

Following his election victory last September, Fico, a politician whose career has been characterised by strong emotions, radical positions, stormy rhetoric, and even assassinations, returned to the spotlight.

One of them caused Fico to lose power in 2018. At the time, the murder of investigative journalist Ján Kuciak and his fiancée Martina Kušnírová was incomprehensible to the Slovakian public.

Following mass street protests demanding an investigation into the murder, Fico's government resigned.

Therefore, the attempt to kill him six years later occurred after the insufficiently healed trauma from the murder of a journalist. During this period, major political changes in the surrounding area further polarised the divided society, leaving the young Slovakian democracy unable to maintain social stability.

Transitioning away from liberal democracy

The attitude towards Russia and its aggression on Ukraine is the most significant dividing line in Slovakian politics, including all the consequences of the conflict in the Ukrainian neighbourhood.

Fico's coalition succeeded in last year's elections in large part because it pandered to the still widespread pro-Russian sentiment of Slovaks. Some of his extremist partners, such as Mr Blah of Fico's Smer party, have in recent months announced a confrontation with anyone spreading Russophobia.

"We will never forget the sacrifice made by the Russian people in World War II and we will do everything we can to stop extremists who spread sick Russophobia and other fascist narratives against Russia", said Mr Blaha.



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The ruling bloc's positions on Russia, as well as the increased Euroscepticism that Fico's government has brought, strongly confront those of the opposing bloc of liberal, pro-EU, and pro-NATO forces that suffered a defeat in the last parliamentary and presidential elections.

Furthermore, Fico's cabinet's hints that they would impose stricter state control over the media and the judiciary have exacerbated the conflict.

Europe is well aware of these tendencies to undermine some of the most significant liberal democratic institutions, having recently dealt with them in Poland and even more recently in Hungary.

The Slovakian leaders in the new government, above all Fico, emphasise the examples of these two neighbouring Eastern European countries and their leaders as role models for their policies.

The assassination attempt on Prime Minister Fico appears to be an event that will further fuel the already existing animosities on the political stage and polarise it even more than it already was.

The ruling bloc will certainly seek political satisfaction for the attempted murder of its leader, not just a rapid and efficient investigation and court judgement.

Given the inherited sharp divisions in Slovak society, there is little indication that the shocking assassination attempt on the prime minister will be a moment of warning and the beginning of a stabilisation on social scene.