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## The Madness of Zoran Janković

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The political survival of Zoran Janković is something to behold. It is only in the recent months that 'crisis' and 'Slovenia' seem less synonymous with one another. After the results of last December's stress test were deemed manageable attention shifted to other items on the government's austerity check list. The media were no longer reporting on a potential European Union (E.U) bailout, or whether Slovenia was going to follow Cyprus into crisis. The apparent success of Alenka Bratušek's government in riding out the financial crisis stymied criticism and gave the impression that the regime of self-imposed austerity wouldn't be so bad after all. This is also a considerable success for the still young Pozitivna Slovenia (PS) party, founded by Janković in 2011, who were the largest party in government after the 2011 election, and held both the Prime Minister's office and the mayorship of Ljubljana among other posts. They could certainly have seen out the mandate in office and been able to enter the next elections off the back of a period of stability and successful crisis management.

Regardless of this success, Janković decided this is the moment to upset the balance of power and provoke a fresh political crisis. He announced in April that he would be challenging Bratušek for the presidency of PS, and on the party's annual congress, he succeeded. This both undermined the legitimacy of Bratušek as Prime Minister, but also left her with few options beyond quitting the party. It also provoked the government's coalition partners to announce they would leave the government and seek early elections. But with Janković now leading PS into new elections, the chance of winning again is far from guaranteed.

Janković formed PS in October, 2011 ahead of the election. At the time he gambled on success and give up his mayorship of Ljubljana to run for Parliament. His gambled initially came good when the party took the largest number of votes, equivalent to 28 percent of all votes. However, he was subsequently unable to form a government. PS failed to bring together the necessary coalition that would form a majority block in the Parliament. This failure was largely down to Janković and his bullish approach. For months after the election PS attempted to negotiate with various parties, but eventually the initiative was passed to the Slovenian Democratic Party (SDS), the party of former Prime Minister Janez Janša, which had come second in the general election. They were successful in forming a majority and took over the government, with Janša installed as Prime Minister.

Despite this set back, Janković staged a quick comeback through the special election for mayorship of Ljubljana (held as a result of his stepping down). For the next year, PS sat in the opposition in government. But at the end of 2012 Slovenia witnessed a massive, popular uprising that lasted over two months. While this significantly weakened Janša's government, it was the emergence of personal charges of embezzlement, among others, made against him by the Commission for the Prevention of Corruption in the Republic of Slovenia, KPK, which made his position untenable. At the same time charges were also levied against Janković for a much greater sum (over €2 million compared to around €200,000 in Janša's case). Amazingly there was no question of Janković resigning as mayor. In this, the public focus remained very much on Janša and, after the uprising was centralized in Ljubljana, on the parliament. Janković's ongoing popularity with many Ljubljana voters shielded him from a similar fate. Presenting his initial resignation from the head of PS as a sacrifice for the party also removed some of the pressure.

Yet even this was predominantly a tactical move and in his mind at least, a temporary one. The collapse of the ruling coalition after the uprising gave PS, as the first placed party in the 2011 election, a second chance to form a coalition without new elections. With the corruption scandal and the reluctance of potential coalition partners, it was clear that for PS to have a chance at forming a government, Janković would need to step aside. Bratušek replaced him and successfully formed a government.

Yet only 13 months later, on the 25th of April Janković won the internal PS vote for the presidency of the party, thus reclaiming what he apparently believes is rightfully his. As she said she would when Janković declared he would challenge her, Bratušek left the party and then announced she would leave the government. The coalition partners have followed suit, and after a meeting between Bratušek and President of the Republic Bohrut Pahor, the coalition agreed to push for early elections, possibly before the summer. Bratušek officially resigned from Government on Monday, May 5th, while the date for elections remains to be set.

Yet the question remains: why did Janković chose this moment to make his move? The most obvious reason seems to be a desire to become Prime Minister. But past success is no guarantee for the future. One fact that plays into his hand is the possible imprisonment of Janša. Janša was sentenced due to corrupt practices surrounding the purchase of weapons in 2006 (when he was still Prime Minister), where he and two associates attempted to claim a €2 million fee. He was initially sentenced in June 2013, but fought the charge. However, the verdict was upheld by Slovenia's Higher Court the very same day that Janković reclaimed the PS presidency. This effectively knocks the most powerful competitor out of contention, as early elections would not give Janša time to fight the decision, thus making him ineligible for public office. The full effect of the sentencing on SDS remains to be seen, but the loss of their president, and one of Slovenia's most renowned (and polarizing) political figures will weaken the party.

In addition, Janković is clearly still seen as an effective manager who successfully ran the Mercator supermarket chain and has overseen the gentrification of Ljubljana, including the building of a new stadium complex and downtown revitalization. The Mercator group, it is worth noting, has faced financial difficulties over the last years and will be majority owned by the Croatian conglomerate Agrokor by the summer. The purchase of the controlling share of 53.1 percent by Agrokor has faced some public opposition, mostly for nationalistic reasons. The fact that KPK's charge against Janković only elicited a muted response, while Janša fell for €200,000, is testimony to his ability to dodge bullets. All of which may carry some weight in the election

The outcome of the early elections, when they come, is difficult to predict, yet Janković's manoeuvring will not likely play well with voters. The 2012-13 uprising is still fresh in the minds of people, and the appearance of unscrupulous wheeling and dealing that has on its own created a crisis won't be popular. Indeed, already in January, as he attempted to discuss with a group of protestors in the centre of Ljubljana, he was hit with pepper spray from within the crowd. In a recent poll conducted by POP TV, PS took only 5,5 percent of the vote. While Bratušek would take 12 percent (were she to form a party, which looks increasingly likely), second only to SDS.

The effect on PS has also been negative, with many members choosing to follow Alenka Bratušek. PS has lost almost half of its MPs and finds itself now greatly weakened. As far as the financial markets are concerned, they responded well to the call for early elections, but it is clear that they are seeking political stability from Slovenia or bond interest rates will again rise. Janković, of course, is pre-empting all these difficulties by announcing that his only ambition is to be mayor. Yet this statement only returns us to the initial question of why he saw the need to reclaim the head of PS, triggering the collapse of the government and the division of his party.

Slovenia is still in a political context where elite are seen as corrupt and as the cause of the countries poor economic and social situation. New, upstart parties, such as the Initiative for Democratic Socialism (IDS) and Solidarnost, untainted by any part in national politics until now, are gaining a fair amount of attention. Furthermore, Janković's own argument that his move would not be destabilizing has proven absolutely false. As the financial crisis fades from the headlines, if not from living rooms across the country, the political crisis has taken its place. Once again people face uncertainty as they wait for the political elite to negotiate the date of the elections, and to decide on which candidates voters can chose from. Regardless of the final outcome of these changes, Janković at least had one sharp insight: things will never be the same.

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