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Ongoing tension within SDK should not threaten stability of the Government

The ongoing process of regrouping the forces on the Slovak political scene resulted in the change of configuration within the governmental coalition by the turn of 2000 and 2001. After the departure of nine deputies of the Christian Democratic Movement (KDH) from the deputies' club of SDK and formation of a new independent club of KDH in the Parliament, the original governmental four-coalition transformed into a group of five parties (SDK, SDL, SMK, SOP and KDH).

Ultimate separation of KDH from SDK ended the process of search for a mutually acceptable after-election model of coexistence of individual components of SDK (platforms, mother parties, and fractions) within a common organizational structure. Regarding the different – even- incompatible – notions of individual components of SDK about the organization of relations within SDK (creation of a unified “umbrella” entity vs. return to the initial standard coalition of five parties), this process was marked by strong elements of conflict and competition.

The establishment of a new political entity – Slovak Democratic and Christian Union (SDKÚ) by the group around Chairman of SDK Dzurinda at the beginning of 2000, its following fusion with the Democratic Union (one of the mother parties of SDK) and refusal of the SDKÚ representatives to define their new political entity as a parliamentary force with its own platform within the Club of SDK MPs, indicated a culmination of mutual negative relations between SDKÚ on the side and KDH and DS on the other.

After the institutional congress of SDKÚ in the middle of 2000, KDH announced the departure of its deputies from the situation, which caused fears of a number of both domestic and foreign observers concerning possible destabilization of the relations within the government coalition as well as weakening of the reform steps of the government, the following factors played key roles:

- unambiguous declarations of the representatives of KDH regarding unconditional support of the fulfillment of the Government Program and interest to remain in the governmental coalition until the end of this election period,
- absence of signals from KDH regarding a possible enforcement of its power ambitions in the case of its conversion into an independent governmental entity,
- agreement of the other governmental parties (SDL, SOP and SMK) regarding establishment of a separate club of KDH MPs in the Parliament,
- readiness of coalition partners to accept the change of the configuration within the governmental coalition without opening the Coalition Treaty of October 1998

The departure of KDH MPs from the SDK deputies' club caused a further visible tension in the relations between SDKÚ and KDH. However, the fairly fast solving of the situation without any principal change of the formal frame of a coalition cooperation (such a change would certainly cost a lot of energy and time, what could turn the attention of the coalition and its ability to continue to govern and to solve the tasks it yet needs to face.

The step of KDH, due to which the deputies' club of SDK was reduced to 33 MPs, burdened the political entities, the members of which remained in the club of SDK, with the task to modify their mutual relations according to the actual distribution of seats (19 MPs supporting SDKÚ, six MPs of DS (Democratic Party), three MPs of SDSS (Social Democrats), three MPs of SDSS (Social Democrats), three MPs of SZS (Green Party) and two MPs of LDU (Liberal Democratic Union). At the same time, the position of the strongest fraction (group of SDKÚ) based on the effort to formally remain being an extra-parliamentary power until the elections 2001, did not change.

However, the representatives of DS did not agree with such a situation since the very beginning and DS admitted the possibility of DS deputies' departure from the SDK MPs club at the meeting of its Republic Board in the beginning of December 2000. This possibility was put into practice only several days later during the meeting of the Chairman of SDKU and SDK Mikuláš Dzurinda and the representatives of the mother parties.

Chairman of DS Ján Langoš announced that the MPs of DS were leaving the club of SDK. Unlike KDH, where the decision on the final separation from SDK was unanimously supported inside the movement and its leading bodies, the move of the chairman of DS evoked disagreement of a few top representatives of the party. Vice-chairman of DS Ľudovít Kaník criticized the steps of Ján Langoš, Vice-premier for economy Ivan Mikloš and Commissioner for reform of public administration Viktor Nižňanský did not agree with the action of the chairman of DS, one MP of DS refused to leave the club of SDK.

Protests of those disagreeing with the steps of Ján Langoš were aimed mainly at the way of adoption and announcement of the decision about the definite separation of DS from SDK. As far as the two leading representatives of DS, symbolizing economic and social reforms – Ivan Mikloš and Viktor Nižňanský – are concerned, disagreement with the act of five MPs of their own party resulted in their decision to leave DS.

The announcement of DS regarding the departure of its deputies from the club of SDK evoked, alike in the case of KDH, initially mainly concerns about possible destabilization of the situation within the coalition. However, the consecutive development showed that this decision affected mainly DS itself. The representatives of DS declared support to the Government regarding the fulfillment of its program as well as overall support of the coalition. Yet, the party lost its immediate presence in the Cabinet and the most popular politician who would, in case of being elected into one of the top positions within the party, be able to contribute to the stabilization or increase of its electoral preferences and therefore improve the party's position in the negotiations about the conditions of the creation of pre-election cooperation with the closest partners (SDKÚ and KDH).

DS will have to cope with the consequences of the decision on the exit from the deputies' club of SDK in such a way that it would maintain its position of a relevant political power. The departure of Ivan Mikloš and Viktor Nižňanský from DS should not, however immediately be reflected in the ability of the Government to realize reform steps. DS itself does not even request the departure of Ivan Mikloš from the Government. On the contrary, it declares continuation of the support for his policy of economic reforms as well as the enforcement of public administration reform connected with the activities of Viktor Nižňanský.

It is not likely that Ivan Mikloš would lose political support in the future, necessary to proceed with reform policy. The five MPs of DS, who are in the Parliament as independent deputies, support the Government and de facto remained being a part of the governmental coalition. Although it cannot be excluded that regrouping of forces within the Government coalition will continue and will affect the composition of other MPs' clubs in the Parliament, it is almost impossible that this process would influence the overall balance of power between coalition and opposition.