

## Slovakia: Highly organized crime

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July 2022

**The Slovakian government is in crisis. An already fractious coalition threatens to be split by the request of one party that Finance Minister Igor Matovic be replaced or else they walk – but that any departure could cause Matovic’s party, which he leads, to likewise pull out. This is quite the standoff, but may still yet be preferable to Slovakia’s recent political history whereby the country was a literal Mafia state.**



This was the doing of former Prime Minister Robert Fico, in office in two spells between 2006 and 2018, and who was personally alleged to have created a criminal gang run from the PM’s office that was not only involved in financial crime and trafficking, but the collection of ‘dirt’ on political opponents and exploitable individuals & businesses alike. Fico (who still sits as an opposition MP) finally ran out of road after the killing of an investigative journalist probing government corruption prompted mass protests, but the damage done by both his own criminal gang, and the revelations that at least two senior ministers in his administration were working hand-in-glove with the ‘Ndrangheta (Italian mafia), mean that the roots of organised crime and corruption run deep. Out of necessity, his successors introduced a major anti-corruption sweep that has so far rolled up judges, police chiefs and business leaders alike, although due to immunity laws Fico himself remains uncharged and unaccountable.

Not only the ‘Ndrangheta, but assorted Balkan and Russian mafia groups, and domestic Slovakian organised crime syndicates, are operating in-country and working not only with each other (with ‘gang warfare’ a relatively rare phenomenon in Slovakia) but forging deep ties with political and business leaders, making the resulting informal associations extremely difficult to fully disrupt and destroy. The true extent of just how much Slovakia remains a Mafia state is unknown, and short of a scorched-earth policy against all current politicians, cannot be stamped out. However, as much as post-Soviet conditions created the environment by which organised crime could initially flourish in Slovakia and were matched by geographic centrality and EU accession which ‘improved’ it even further in this regard, the current mechanisms are proven wholly inadequate to act as a counter.

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The judiciary are seen as weak and compliant to the whims of powerful politicians, anti-corruption legislation and framework is either ignored or watered-down by the time it gets ultimate approval, and the political classes themselves have an arguable vested interest in perpetuating things as they are. In 2018 Slovakia was ranked as the most corrupt country in the EU, and matters cannot be said to be improved: earlier this year the former head of the Chief Prosecutor's Office, Dusan Kovacik, was sentenced to eight years in jail for his own actions of corruption and bribery.

While Kovacik's punishment is to be applauded in that, elsewhere, he might have walked away free, for your own chief prosecutor to go down for breaking his own rules is quite the achievement, and this sums up Slovakia as a whole: desperately trying to resolve problems of a past that are bleeding evermore into the present, and where the Mafia could conceivably speak Louis XIV's favourite maxim: *I am the state*.

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