



EGP fact-finding mission to Slovenia - Report

Context

On 20 January 2023 the *European Green Party* received an application for membership from the Slovenian political party *VESNA – zelena stranka (Spring - Green Party)*.

The *European Green Party's* Committee made the unanimous decision to proceed with the application after thorough considerations. The application is due to be voted upon by the delegates to the 37th Congress of the *European Green Party* to be held between 2-3 June 2023 in Vienna, Austria.

As a next step a fact-finding mission was organised to Ljubljana, Slovenia on 23-24 March 2023 with the participation of EGP co-chair Thomas Waitz and the remote participation of EGP co-chair Mélanie Vogel (responsible for Slovenia alongside Thomas Waitz) and EGP Secretary General Benedetta De Marte.

The present report summarises the findings of the fact-finding mission.

Short history of the party

During the 2019 European Parliamentary election campaign the *European Green Party* supported the *Povežimo se (Let's Connect)* coalition list in Slovenia spearheaded by then chairperson of the *Ekologi brez meja (Ecologists Without Borders)* NGO, Urša Zgojznik. Although the coalition failed to elect a Member of the European Parliament, several of the Green minded activists and NGO representatives gathered around the campaign decided to continue their political engagement and started working on establishing a new Green political party in Slovenia. This group of people stayed in contact with the *European Green Party* as well, regularly attending EGP events.

The new party, *VESNA – zelena stranka (Spring - Green Party)*, was registered in February 2022 to compete in the 2022 parliamentary, presidential and local elections in Slovenia. During the party's founding congress two prominent NGO representatives with a long track record of environmental work in Slovenian civil society, Uroš Macerl (who won the Goldman Environmental Prize in 2017) and Urša Zgojznik were elected co-chairs of the party.

During the April 2022 parliamentary elections *VESNA* gained 1.35% of the vote nationwide, staying below the 4% parliamentary threshold. With this result, however, the party qualified for state subsidies.

During the October 2022 presidential elections *VESNA* supported the candidacy of Kočevje mayor Vladimir Prebilič, who was running as an independent. Mr Prebilič came 4th in the first round of the presidential elections securing 10.6% of the votes.



During the November - December 2022 local elections VESNA elected 8 local community councillors, 14 local councillors including 1 in the capital city of Ljubljana, 1 mayor and supported the campaign of 4 allied mayors, who all got elected.

VESNA held its second congress in February 2023 focusing on consolidating the party's structures after a lengthy election period. By the end of 2023 the party ambitions to have established local chapters in all eight national parliamentary constituencies in Slovenia.

Short overview of the political situation in the country

- Unitary parliamentary republic with a bicameral parliament
- Population: 2.1 million
 - 83.1% Slovenes
 - 2% Serbs
 - 1.8% Croats
 - 1.6% Bosniaks
 - 0.4% Romani
 - 0.3% Hungarians
 - 0.1% Italians
- NATO and EU member (since 2004)
- Eurozone member (since 2007)
- The country's forecasted nominal GDP for 2023 is 65 billion USD and 111 billion USD taking purchasing power parity into account. It ranks 38th in the world in terms of nominal GDP per capita, and 36th when taking PPP into account. The service sector gives almost two thirds of the economic output in the country (65.9%), followed by industry (32.2%) and agriculture (1.8%).
- According to Eurostat in 2021 13.2% of the population was at risk of poverty or social exclusion. At the time of writing the country has a 9.9% inflation rate, putting it in the mid-range of the 27 EU countries.
- *Transparency International's* [Corruption Perception Index](#) for 2022 ranks Slovenia as 41st out of 180 countries in the world achieving 56/100 points. The EU average here is 66/100, placing Slovenia 18th out of 27 EU countries.
- *Freedom House's* [Freedom in the World report for 2023](#) designates Slovenia as "free", giving it a total score of 95/100 (39/40 in political rights and 56/60 in civil liberties). For comparison Croatia received a "free" designation and 84 points (35/40 in political rights and 49/60 in civil liberties).
- *Reporters Without Borders' 2022 World Press Freedom Index* ranks Slovenia as 54th out of 180 countries, giving it a score of 68.54/100. For comparison, 48th place Croatia has a score of 70.42/100. In Slovenia's case the [country specific report](#) notes that "A climate of hostility toward journalists fostered by Prime Minister Janez Janša has led to physical assaults and online attacks. Although the legal framework protecting press freedom remains strong, the media are subject to political pressure and strategic lawsuits against public participation (SLAPP)."



Politics

- Currently the country is led by a three-party centre-left coalition government composed of:
 - *Freedom Movement - GS (-)*
 - This party also gives the Prime Minister, Robert Golob
 - *Social Democrats - SD (PES)*
 - *The Left (PEL)*
- There are two opposition parties in the parliament:
 - *Slovenian Democratic Party - SDS (EPP)*
 - *New Slovenia – Christian Democrats - NSi (EPP)*
- Slovenia has a dynamically changing political landscape. The 2011, 2014 and 2022 parliamentary elections were all won by new parties founded only a few months before the respective elections that were spearheaded by a political figure promising change. The 2018 election is only an exception from this pattern in the sense that the newcomer came second in the elections, but still managed to give the Prime Minister in the period following the elections.
- The most stable parties are Janez Janša's *Slovenian Democratic Party - SDS (EPP)* and Tanja Fajon's *Social Democrats - SD (PES)*. They have been represented in every National Assembly since Slovenia's independence from Yugoslavia in 1991. *New Slovenia – Christian Democrats - NSi (EPP)* has been continuously represented in the parliament since 2011, while *The Left (PEL)* has had representation in various forms since 2014.
- Robert Golob's *Freedom Movement - GS (-)* was only founded in January 2022 and it absorbed two existing ALDE member parties of two former Prime Ministers, who also became members of Golob's cabinet (Alenka Bratušek and Marjan Šarec). Uroš Brežan, former mayor of Tolmin, in which capacity he was also a member of the Green Group in the European Committee of the Regions, is serving as Minister of Environment and Space in Golob's government at the time of writing.
- The closest upcoming election in the country is the European Parliamentary elections in June 2024, while the next general election is scheduled for Spring 2026.

European Parliament

- The country elects 8 MEPs with a 4% legal threshold. However, the effective threshold is higher than this given the low number of seats Slovenia has in the EP.
- Currently it has 4 EPP, 2 S&D and 2 Renew MEPs

Main political values in programme

VESNA – *zelena stranka* categorised their electoral manifesto for the 2022 Slovenian parliamentary elections into four pillars: environment, democracy, social justice and creativity.



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Under the section on environment the party promises to prepare sectoral carbon budgets in Slovenia to economically incentivise the decrease of CO₂ emissions; phase out environmentally harmful subsidies and adjust the tax system to promote the efficient use of energy; put in place energy efficiency focused renovation schemes for buildings; subsidise energy efficiency investments for energy companies; increase the share of renewables in the Slovenian energy mix; direct public investments into public transport infrastructure; reform the commuting allowance for people employed in Slovenia to incentives sustainable transport options; shift agricultural production to promote safe, healthy and locally produced food; ensure the right of citizens to live in a healthy natural environment and their access to clean water.

Under the chapter on democracy the party pledges to involve civil society in democratic decision making processes; expand the avenues of deliberative democratic practices; fight corruption and environmental crime; safeguard the rule of law and free media; defend women's rights, including the access to abortion; stand up against discrimination before the law.

In the social justice section the party describes their vision of a just Green transition that treats affordable housing as a priority through housing cooperatives and proper regulation and taxation of short term renting; introduces the polluter pays principle into the Slovenian taxation system; shifts tax burdens from salaries to capital gains; fights tax avoidance; ensures the sustainability, accessibility and proper maintenance of the healthcare system; puts in place policies for a dignified old age and regulates different, often precarious employment forms in a more fair manner.

Lastly, in the chapter on creativity the party puts forward proposals on a sustainable and high quality public education system with a large autonomy to the teaching staff and on investments into higher education, research and development.

Existence of youth wing

VESNA – zelena stranka has no youth wing at the time of writing. However, the foundation operating in cooperation with the party has plans to participate in the European Green Activist Training series of the Green European Foundation targeting young people.

List of organised meetings during the fact-finding mission

- Jaka Kranjc, secretary general, [Ecologists Without Borders](#)
- Barbara Kvac & Taj Zavodnik, climate and energy experts, [Association for Sustainable Development](#)
- The board of *VESNA – zelena stranka*
- The council of *VESNA – zelena stranka*
- Tony Mlakar, environmental lawyer, [Alpe Adria Green](#)
- Local councillors and mayors of *VESNA – zelena stranka*



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- Igor Jurišič, president of *SMS – Zeleni Evrope* (EGP), EGP's full member party in Slovenia
- Gregor Drnovšek & Ksenija Horvat, journalists, [RTV Slovenija](#)
- Goran Lukič, trade unionist, [Workers' Advisory Service](#)
- Luka Mesec, Minister of Labor, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities & Asta Vrečko, Minister of Culture in Golob's cabinet, as well as Coordinator and Deputy Coordinator respectively of *The Left* (PEL)
- Domen Kos, CEO & consultant, [Institute for Political Management Group](#)

Findings from the above meetings

From talking to several civil society stakeholders, academics, journalists and political actors (listed above) during EGP's fact-finding mission to Slovenia, EGP's delegation learned the following:

- The public representatives of *VESNA – zelena stranka* have substantial credibility in terms of their integrity due to a proven track record of working in civil society organisations before entering politics. The NGO interlocutors EGP talked to mentioned that they could see the party as an ally once it gets more prominent representation on the national level.
- In the months leading up to the fact-finding mission environmental and climate issues got an enhanced focus in the public debate in Slovenia due to a new Ministry responsible for the portfolio being established in the Golob government and a new government institution being set up to work on climate related matters. The interlocutors EGP talked to noted that this could expand the reach of Green narratives and could be a growth potential for a Green party in Slovenia.
- *VESNA – zelena stranka* has little access to media due to the party's size and level of representation.
- *VESNA* operates in a fragmented Green political space. Slovenia has at least three parties who claim Green credentials and the minor governing partner *The Left* (PEL) also competes for this electorate.
- Several interlocutors noted that EGP membership could be a significant added value for *VESNA* to better navigate the above-mentioned landscape.
- *VESNA* is seen as a party that is actively working on interlinking social and environmental topics in public discourse.
- At the moment of writing there is no active cooperation between *SMS – Zeleni Evrope* (EGP) and *VESNA – zelena stranka* as evidenced by the separate local election tickets endorsed by the two parties for the local council of Maribor in November - December 2022. EGP's Full Member party sees developing this cooperation as favourable in the future before the party is able to endorse *VESNA*'s membership request in the European Green Party.

Note: Notes taken during the interviews with stakeholders are available upon request.



Conclusions and recommendations

Conclusions

VESNA – zelena stranka is a relatively young party with low levels of elected representation that results in little access to media. The party is only at the time of writing working on extending its party structures to the whole of Slovenia and is in the process of consolidating its existing institutional structures.

Nevertheless, the party's public faces have credibility, the public environment in which the party operates holds growth potential for the party and its recently acquired elected offices can serve as centres around which grassroots activism, direct citizen engagement and party structures can be constructed.

Membership in EGP can assist the party in the above process, especially considering that the next nationwide election in Slovenia is going to be the European Parliamentary election in 2024.

Recommendation

The Committee of the European Green Party believes that *VESNA – zelena stranka* meets EGP's membership criteria.

The Committee of the European Green Party sees the extension of the Green European family to more parties in the Southern and Eastern part of Europe as desirable.

During the fact-finding mission the Committee of the European Green Party held a consultation meeting with EGP's existing Full Member Party in Slovenia, *SMS – Zeleni Evrope*. The position of *SMS – Zeleni Evrope* communicated towards the EGP Committee during this meeting and later reiterated via e-mail on multiple occasions was and remains that *SMS – Zeleni Evrope* could only support *VESNA – zelena stranka*'s Associate Membership in the European Green Party if meaningful cooperation can be established between the two parties. In case this cooperation cannot be established, *SMS – Zeleni Evrope* opposes *VESNA – zelena stranka*'s Associate Membership in the European Green Party.

Considering all the above, the EGP Committee recommends to the delegates of the 37th EGP Congress to accept *VESNA – zelena stranka* as an Associate Member.