

# [***Slovak prime minister's condition remains serious but prognosis positive after assassination bid***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6C2G-9N01-JC5B-G2WK-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Body**

BANSKA BYSTRICA, Slovakia — Slovakia’s populist prime minister, [*Robert Fico*](https://apnews.com/article/robert-fico-slovakia-shot-prime-minister-751051f2a36391919790c62d664a5e6d), remained in serious condition on Sunday but has been given a positive prognosis four days after he was shot multiple times in an assassination attempt that has sent shockwaves across the deeply polarized European Union nation, the defense minister said.

“The worst of what we feared has passed, at least for the moment. But his condition remains serious," Robert Kalinak told reporters outside the hospital where Fico is being treated. “His condition is stable with a positive prognosis.”

Kalinak added that the hospital treating the Slovak leader in Banská Bystrica, a former coal mining town of 16,000 situated 29 kilometers (17 miles) from where Fico was attacked, will continue to issue updates on his health status.

On Sunday afternoon, Kalinak revealed new details about the ongoing investigation saying there may have been a “third party” involved in “acting for the benefit of the perpetrator”, in what was previously described by the authorities as a “lone wolf” attack. The official did not provide additional details.

“The situation is turning out to be even worse than we expected,” Kalinak said. ”Plus other indications that these facts of Wednesday’s attack have been discussed in a wider circle. All of this is shocking information, and for many of us, it would be much easier if we could talk about just one person.”

Milan Urbáni, deputy director of the hospital, told reporters that "Based on the doctors’ morning consultation, we can conclude that the patient is currently out of a life-threatening condition. His condition remains very serious, and he needs a long time to rest to recover. We firmly believe that everything will go in a good direction.”

Fico, 59, was shot in the abdomen as he greeted supporters on Wednesday outside a cultural center in the town of Handlova, nearly 140 kilometers (85 miles) northeast of the capital, Bratislava. Video showed the Slovak premier approach people gathered at barricades and reach out to shake hands as a man stepped forward, extended his arm and fired five rounds before being tackled and arrested.

On Friday, Fico underwent two hours of surgery to remove dead tissue from his gunshot wounds, but he was not healthy enough to be transferred to the capital, officials said Saturday.

The country’s Specialized Criminal Court in the town of Pezinok on Saturday ordered the suspected assailant, who is charged with attempted murder, [*to remain behind bars*](https://apnews.com/article/slovakia-prime-minister-shooting-fico-25b24fa1f6caf68556a67a2d1e5f302c). Prosecutors said they feared he could flee or commit other crimes if freed, a court spokesperson said. The suspect can appeal the order.

Little information about the would-be assassin has been disclosed after prosecutors told police not to publicly identify him or release details about the case. Unconfirmed media reports have named him and said he was a 71-year-old retiree known as an amateur poet who may have once worked as a mall security guard. Government authorities have given details that matched that description. They said the suspect didn’t belong to any political groups, though the attack itself was politically motivated.

Slovakia’s interior minister, Matus Sutaj Estok, said Sunday that the attack on Fico is an “attack on democracy in any normal country”. “At a time when democracy is being attacked, it must be the security forces that have to give a clear signal that they are prepared to protect the population of the Slovak Republic,” he said.

Fico said last month on Facebook that he believed rising tensions in the country could lead to the killing of politicians, and he blamed the media for fueling tensions in the country of 5.4 million.

Slovakia’s three-party coalition government has also partly accused the media of fueling the vitriolic discourse that has beleaguered the EU country in recent years and led to deep social divisions.

Andrej Danko, chairman of the government’s smallest coalition partner, the Slovak National Party, said Sunday he is expecting a government meeting early next week to discuss media laws and journalistic ethics, including how journalists report on domestic ***politics***.

In his address on Sunday, Kalinak also stressed that lessons must be learned from the violent attack on Fico, who has long been a divisive figure in Slovakia and beyond. “This must be a memento. If we don’t learn, we’re heading for hell,” he said. “We need to bring this situation back to what we can consider standard.”

Fico’s government has made efforts to [*overhaul public broadcasting*](https://apnews.com/article/slovaki-protest-fico-public-broadcasting-dd76c4431d2552982aed232b1a7c4e83) — a move critics said would give the government full control of public television and radio. That, along with his [*plans to amend the penal code*](https://apnews.com/article/slovakia-president-complaint-corruption-4594dde7add60cb68158c2b1f7e7411d) to eliminate a special anti-graft prosecutor, have led opponents to worry that Fico will lead Slovakia down a more autocratic path.

Before Fico returned to power last year, many of his political and business associates were the focus of police investigations, and dozens have been charged. His plan to overhaul the penal system would eliminate the office of the special prosecutor that deals with organized crime, corruption and extremism.

At the St. Francis Xavier Cathedral in Banská Bystrica on Sunday, churchgoer and lawyer Pavel Bachleda called the assassination attempt “a great tragedy” but also expressed concerns about how Fico and his Smer, or Direction, party has conducted itself in recent years.

“I would say partly also his actions, his actions in the previous months and years, have brought about the situation in our country,” he told The Associated Press. “You get the impression that they concentrate more on revenge, political revenge than on real things that our country needs.”

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Stanislav Hodina in Prague, Czech Republic, and Stephen McGrath in Side, Turkey, contributed to this report.

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