

Black Cube, leaked tapes and corruption: Israeli spy firm crashes Slovenia's election

Foreign interference looms over the vote after accusations that a private intelligence company meddled in the campaign.

By **ALI WALKER, SEBASTIAN STARCEVIC**
and **ANTOANETA ROUSI**

in Ljubljana

Slovenia's election campaign was already steeped in acrimony.

Then operatives from a notable private intelligence company, founded by former members of the Israel Defense Forces, flew to Ljubljana in the depths of winter, Slovenian law enforcement authorities say.

The private jet that landed on a freezing December day was carrying Dan Zorella, CEO of Black Cube; Giora Eiland, former head of Israel's National Security Council; and two other men, according to the authorities, who allege they were engaged in "covert surveillance and wiretapping."

The Black Cube operatives now stand accused by Slovenian law enforcement of helping to leak recordings designed to undermine Prime Minister Robert Golob's government by linking it to corruption, days before a knife-edge national election. The tapes show prominent Slovenian figures apparently discussing corruption, illegal lobbying and the misuse of state funds.

Representatives for Black Cube did not respond to POLITICO's requests for comment on the allegations.

Slovenia goes to the polls Sunday for a vote that pits liberal Golob against the right-wing populist Janez Janša, who currently has a narrow lead according to **POLITICO's Poll of Polls**. Golob has warned that victory for Janša — a pro-MAGA, four-time former premier — would **threaten the fabric of the EU**. For its part, Janša's party routinely depicts Golob as a corrupt former energy tycoon.

The Black Cube allegations land at a moment of heightened anxiety in Europe over covert foreign interference in democratic elections, from influence operations to political sabotage. In Slovenia, they risk further polarizing a race that has come to symbolize a broader clash between liberal, pro-EU forces and an emboldened right-wing populist movement.

Golob's left-liberal coalition and Janša's Slovenian Democratic Party (SDS) are currently looking to utilize the leaked tape scandal to buttress attacks on each other. The SDS says the recordings — which feature a former minister, a top lawyer and other prominent figures — are proof of corruption at the highest levels of Slovenian

society; while Golob's supporters say the scandal is evidence that Janša is collaborating with foreign entities to retake power.

“The fact that covert surveillance and wiretapping in this case involve a private intelligence agency from Israel points to something deeply troubling. This is not just another incident, it raises serious concerns about the integrity of democratic processes in Slovenia,” Golob said this week.

“Any attempt by foreign actors to interfere in elections in a democratic member state of the European Union is unacceptable,” he added.

During a press conference Wednesday afternoon, Vojko Volk, Slovenia's state secretary for national and international security, said that Black Cube representatives visited the country four times and that on Dec. 11 a team, including Zorella, spent time on the street that is home to SDS headquarters — though he stopped short of saying they went into the building.

Janša has **threatened to sue** activist Nika Kovač — from the Institute 8 organization that lobbies on social issues — who helped publish the initial report alleging that Black Cube operatives had made repeated visits to Slovenia and met with SDS officials.

“Janez Janša will probably be surprised, but we are happy that the Slovenian Democratic Party will file lawsuits over revelations about the activities of the Israeli intelligence agency Black Cube in Slovenia,” Kovač told POLITICO. “We welcome all proceedings in which it can be revealed and clarified what this ‘Private Mossad’ was doing in Slovenia and with whom.”

Janša's party said that “a monument should be erected in the middle of Ljubljana” in tribute to the Black Cube officials, if they had “truly uncovered all this corruption of unimaginable proportions.” On Wednesday night, Janša admitted that he had **met with Black Cube's Eiland**, but said he could not recall on which date.

‘Threat to national security’

Black Cube, a private intelligence firm founded in 2010, has offices in Tel Aviv, London and Madrid. It was started by Zorella and Avi Yanus, both of whom served in the Israel Defense Forces.

The firm's methods — often rooted in human intelligence and undercover operations — have drawn sustained scrutiny, most notably in the case of convicted sex offender and Hollywood mogul Harvey Weinstein.

He was **accused of hiring Black Cube** to monitor journalists and female accusers, using operatives with fabricated identities to extract information in what became a defining example of private espionage deployed with the aim of suppressing allegations. A Black Cube **board member later apologized**.

Black Cube's advisory orbit has included prominent former Israeli intelligence officials such as Meir Dagan and Efraim Halevy, reinforcing its image as part of a broader ecosystem in which statecraft techniques migrate into the private sector.

In 2022, Romanian prosecutors convicted Black Cube operatives, including Zorella, in absentia of spying on anti-corruption chief Laura Kövesi. The **men struck a plea deal** with prosecutors. The

firm **also targeted critics** of Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán using fake LinkedIn profiles; while recordings later surfaced in pro-government media. A company spokesperson said at the time that it “always operates in full compliance of the law.”

Slovenia’s Intelligence and Security Agency (SOVA) delivered a report to the National Security Council this week, which endorsed the claims about Black Cube’s meddling in the campaign.

The agency’s director “briefed us on facts indicating direct foreign interference with the Slovenian elections,” Volk said Wednesday morning. According to the SOVA director, “this interference was most likely commissioned from within Slovenia. Based on the available data, representatives of the company Black Cube have visited Slovenia four times in the last six months.”

“Black Cube is known for releasing fabricated material at precisely planned times, in this case, just before the elections,” Volk added. “These activities are intended to discredit individuals politically, which may pose a threat to national security and influence democratic elections.”

Opposition attacks

Beyond the espionage claims, the polarized campaign has been marked by a familiar pattern of political attacks.

If the opposition gets into power, its first order of business is lowering taxes, said SDS MEP Romana Tomc, as she took aim at the governing coalition on finances.

“What we have now after four years of Golob’s government is economic decline,” Tomc told POLITICO. “He [Golob] raised taxes a

lot, and we will do what we can to lower them, because we would like people to have more in their pockets, and not only in the state budget.”

Tomc, who is also vice president of the European People’s Party group, hit out at Golob’s recent assertion to POLITICO that Janša, along with Hungarian premier Viktor Orbán, “will try to break up the European Union itself.”

SDS wants to reform the bloc rather than destroy it, she argued. “Our party, with the leadership of Janša, we are really pro-, pro-, pro-European,” Tomc said.

“We are really trying to make Europe better, to make it more functional. And we have, of course, no intention of destroying Europe,” she added. “Being critical to some policies within Europe, I think this is completely normal.”

With days to go before the election, Tomc launched a campaign against the EU’s Enlargement Commissioner Marta Kos, who hails from Golob’s party, **arguing Kos misled the European Parliament** when she denied collaborating with Yugoslavia’s secret police in her youth.

Europe’s biggest political group, the EPP, on Wednesday **called for a special hearing** in the European Parliament to grill Kos.

‘Historic opportunity’

During an interview at his party office in Ljubljana last month, Golob told POLITICO the election marked a “historic opportunity” for Slovenia to return the left-liberal coalition to power, which will

“bring more stability to the country and most probably also to the neighborhood.”

Golob said he is determined to use a potential second mandate to drive forward a health care reform and boost the country’s economic competitiveness, after a first term that was marked by enduring troubles: Russia’s war on Ukraine; an energy crisis; and high inflation.

On Janša, Golob was scathing, accusing him of wasting public money and weaponizing law enforcement during his previous term in office. He also said that Janša would likely be inspired by U.S. President Donald Trump’s hard-line immigration policies.

“We have a far-right leader who has been in power for three terms already, every time was worse. So the first time he didn’t do the things that we are discussing, but every term he comes, it gets worse when it comes to civil rights and the misuse of the law enforcement,” he added.

Golob leads a left-liberal coalition that includes his Freedom Movement, the Social Democrats and The Left, but he said that he’s willing to expand the tent for a second term. “We are open to include any other party or partner that is willing to support the extension and completion of our reforms,” he said.

According to POLITICO’s Poll of Polls, Janša’s SDS leads the Freedom Movement by five percentage points, though Golob can remain in power by teaming up against him with other parties.

During the interview, before the Black Cube allegations, Golob had flagged what appeared to be increased online bot activity making its presence felt in the election campaign.

“Organized hybrid war started on social media, but we cannot attribute it yet to any state or political party — even though our right-populists are enjoying it very much and supporting it when it comes to sharing the information,” he said.

Ali Walker reported from Ljubljana. Seb Starcevic reported from Strasbourg. Antoaneta Roussi reported from Prague.