

General Elections in Luxembourg: the end of the Juncker era?

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Analysis

The decision taken by Luxembourg Prime Minister Jean-Claude Juncker (Christian Social People's Party, PCS/CVS) on 10th July to resign (deferred) from his post has led to the organisation of early general elections that will take place on 20th October next. The electorate will be renewing the 60 members of parliament. This election is the second one to be organised early in the country's history (after the one in 1969).

In July Jean-Claude Juncker lost the support of the Socialist Workers' Party (POS/LSAP), his government partner since the elections on 7th June 2009. Before the vote on a possible motion of censure he suggested that the Luxembourgers go to vote to renew the Parliament and asked the Grand Duke Henri, the Head of State, to postpone the dissolution of parliament, a vital step in order to convene a new election. A political-legal debate was then launched over the constitutionality of this kind of procedure. The State Council indicated that the postponed dissolution was not in line with the Constitution but that the Grand Duke accepted the Prime Minister's proposal so that the country's institutions would not find themselves in stalemate for a long period of time. The political parties unanimously declared that they supported this solution. Parliament will be dissolved on 7th October next.

The general election on 20th October will be the first since 1979 not be organised at the same time as the European election. The campaign will focus more on the Grand Duchy. It started on 16th September. Five parties (all except for the far left, the Left/Dei Lenk (LG/DL)) signed an agreement to undertake a campaign that respected "fair play".

The Luxembourg political system does not function according to alternation and adheres to continuity. After the general elections Luxembourg will be led by a coalition government. This might again bring together the outgoing coalition (PCS/CVS and POSL/LSAP) or a coalition between the PCS/CVS-Democratic Party (PD/DP), which governed the Grand Duchy between 1999 and 2004 – of which Jean-Claude Juncker does hold fond memories. The government could comprise three parties – a configuration which has not occurred since 1964 – for example the POSL/LSAP, PD/DP and the Greens/Dei Greng (LV-DG). The parties which want to govern together have to come to agreement over a political programme and agree on the name of the person who will lead the government coalition.

Although the PCS/CSV could suffer a setback in the ballot it remains to be seen which parties will benefit from this.

The Fall of the Irremovable Jean-Claude Juncker

Irregularities or rather illegal activities were revealed in the management of the State Information Services

(SREL) with the arrest and trial of two former members of the *Brigade mobile de la gendarmerie* in the Bomeleeër Affair, a series of 18 attacks perpetrated in Luxembourg between 1984 and 1986. The SREL has been accused of illegal phone tapping, of undertaking missions without any legal backing, of attempted corruption, the tapping and filing of information on both citizens and MPs.

In November 2012 the media revealed a conversation dating back to 2007 between Jean-Claude Juncker and the former director of the SREL, Marco Mille, during which the latter revealed the existence of 300,000 individual information files on citizens and political figures. During the conversation the former SREL director also speaks of the tapping of conversations between the Grand Duke Henri and the Prime Minister 2005-2006. He also informed Jean-Claude Juncker that there had been regular contacts between the king of Luxembourg and the British secret services.

The Prime Minister stands accused of not noticing these irregularities/illegal activities and as a result of not having warned parliament in time to avoid any malfunction in the SREL. "There have been some serious cases of malfunction. The Prime Minister must accept his res-

possibility not because he is dishonest or incompetent but because he made the wrong choice," stresses Alex Bodry, chair of the POSL/LSAP after the revelations made in the autumn of 2012.

A parliamentary inquiry was created in December 2012 to get to the bottom of these irregularities. The Prime Minister has been interviewed on three occasions. The inquiry confirmed that there were 15,000 information files on citizens, businesses and associations. The committee's final report speaks of serious malfunction within the SREL between 2004 and 2009 and highlights the lacuna in Jean-Claude Juncker's surveillance of this service in his capacity of head of state. *"As the SREL's hierarchical superior not only did the Prime Minister have no control over this service he increasingly omitted informing the parliamentary surveillance committee and even the courts about the irregularities, the infringements and illegal operations that it had undertaken,"* says the parliamentary report. *"Since 1994 the SREL has been under Jean-Claude Juncker's authority. But it has been established that he did not manage to devote the necessary time and attention which were vital to manage and supervise the service,"* he noted.

Jean-Claude Juncker has admitted that he made mistakes but that in no way did he cover any kind of illegal activity. *"Are we responsible for something we did not know? It would be good news for all civil servants who want to do silly things, because that would mean that there would always be a minister to protect them,"* he declared saying *"I effectively said that the SREL was not my priority; I also do not want Luxembourg to have a Prime Minister for whom it would comprise a priority."* *"It was not an objective report but one for the prosecution. There has been malfunction within the SREL but the Prime Minister put an end to this and above all he did not cause them. The other parties did not want to listen to what the head of government had to say,"* stressed Gilles Roth, the chair of the PCS/CSV's parliamentary group.

On 10th July the Socialists (POSL/LSAP), the PCS/CSV government allies launched a motion of censure asking for the dissolution of parliament and the organisation of early general elections. Jean-Claude Juncker, whose party only has 26 of the 60 seats in Parliament, prefer-

red to resign before being placed in a minority position. Two other motions were launched a little time before – the first since 1848 in the Grand Duchy – which were rejected. The SREL affair has therefore caused the fall of Jean-Claude Juncker, Prime Minister of Luxembourg for the last 18 years and the European record holder of longevity as head of government.

The outgoing government parties

Will the Christian Social People's Party retain its leadership?

In Jean-Claude Juncker's opinion – who stands as the victim of a conspiracy, only the people can decide. On 11th July last he was appointed as the lead candidate on the Christian Social People's Party list (PCS/CSV) who chose as its slogan *"Mir man Premier (Together with the Prime Minister)."* *"There is no favourite in these elections. We have some good candidates but it will be difficult. I shall fight to win back the population's confidence. We shall undertake an electoral battle in the same way as everyone else, but we shall show that we are defending people's interests. The future of our citizens and our country deserve to be fought for,"* indicated Jean-Claude Juncker. A social liberal, he is a firm defender in both his country and across Europe, of social justice which he believes to be the *"poor man of the Economic and Monetary Union."* The PCS/CSV is campaigning on its results as the head government and highlights its action in support of families (5.3 billion euro distributed) the reform of the healthcare and pensions systems. It recalls the minimum social wage which it raised twice (in 2011 and 2013) during its term in office. It maintains that it has improved the budgetary balance by 952 billion euro; that it has reduced spending and increased the State's revenues and that it has consolidated public finance to a total of 1.6 billion €.

Socio-economic issues and notably those concerning employment are due to feature at the heart of the electoral campaign. Unemployment lay at 6.9% on 31st August but this figure has risen by 15.2% over one year. It involves 15, 526 people, 44% of whom are long term unemployed. *"Public finance is not as high as before and unemployment is rising; these are our priorities,"* indicated Jean-Claude Juncker. The PCS/CSV is defending the

capping of the wage index. In December 2011 the government approved a bill to adjust salaries to price rises and to compensate for inflation stipulating that this index would only be adjusted once a year instead of a previous twice (in October). The party no longer wants tobacco, alcohol and oil to be included in the calculation of the index. It is standing as the guarantor of the country's stability. It is promising to pay further aid to people with the lowest wages and to introduce a new housing policy. "We have failed in our housing policy. Prices have exploded in an unacceptable way. We need to curb this. We have to step up the pace and insist on rented housing and renovation," declared Jean-Claude Juncker during his party's congress on 21st September last.

The PCS/CSV is planning to submit a project for territorial reform and a re-organisation of local communities to referendum which would suggest the merger of several communities and the extension of the mayors' duties. It is against foreigners' voting rights in the general elections but wants to facilitate access to dual nationality. It hopes to include in the Constitution the modalities of the dissolution of the Chamber of Deputies in the event of a political crisis. Finally it is offering a reform of the SREL and an extension of the role of the supervisory committee governing the latter.

Jean-Claude Juncker has regularly been accused of neglecting his country to the benefit of Europe, notably when the euro crisis was at its height (Jean-Claude Juncker was the chair of the Eurogroup from 2005-2013). "Jean-Claude Juncker is an effective communicator, he represents the party in the international organisations but if I look at national policy I believe he has quite clearly neglected this," wonders Alex Bodry, the chair of the POSL/LASP. The head of government has always maintained that "Defending the interests of Europe also means defending those of Luxembourg."

Can the Socialist Workers' Party win?

The POSL/LASP is being led in this general election by the outgoing Economy Minister Etienne Schneider, appointed as the lead candidate by 99.20% of the vote during the party's congress which has chosen as its slogan "Loscht op muer" (Hope for the Future).

"We did not plan the elections. They are the logical

consequence of the Prime Minister's irresponsibility," indicated the party's chair Alex Bodry. "The Christian Socialists are standing as the victims of a conspiracy, of a terrible manipulation launched by some small minded individuals. This is wrong," he said accusing the PCS/CSV of having "concocted secret conspiracy," to remain in power. "The choice of calling early elections has been dictated by specific elements but also by an environment that is laden with scandal. Returning to ballot will lead to a calming of the situation and a new start," he added maintaining that Luxembourg needed "new impetus, a break with the past." Alex Bodry deplores the "rejection of politics by a part of the population and the loss of citizen confidence in the institutions."

According to a poll by TNS/ILRes for the radio-TV channel RTL and the newspaper Lëtzebuenger Wort, only 12% of the Luxembourgers think that politicians tell the truth. Moreover half of those interviewed (50%) say they do not trust the outgoing government and 55% want to see a new government coalition after 20th October next.

Etienne Schneider however wants to place the debate in another area. "The issue is not about Jean-Claude Juncker or the SREL, we must now discuss the programme," he declared. Although the government coalition is officially dead it is still a reality when it comes to defending its results. As the PCS/CSV with whom it governed for nearly 30 years (except for the period 1999-2004) the POSL/LASP indeed highlights its action over the most recent term in office. It wants to maintain the Welfare State. To do this it is planning to reform the fiscal system by adding a further tax band of 45% (the highest is 39%) for couples earning over 400,000 € per year (200 000 € for single people). The POSL/LASP wants a more progressive income tax and the reintroduction of wealth tax. It is promising a reform of the State as well as that of the electoral law so as the end the accumulation of the mandates of MPs and mayor (as well as a reduction in the number of ministers and MPs), the introduction of obligatory parity on electoral lists, the reduction of the voting age to 16. Finally it wants to introduce into the Constitution the possibility of organising referendums on certain issues. The party's programme was adopted unanimously which is rare in the socialists' history.

Etienne Schneider says he is confident that he will soon

be Prime Minister. If they win on 20th October the socialists might govern with the Democratic Party and the Greens, a unique alliance in the Grand Duchy. *"We have to see which coalition the electorate gives us,"* indicates Etienne Schneider.

The Other Parties

Will the Democratic Party find its way to office?

The Democratic Party (PD/DP) has set the goal of retaining a minimum of 9 seats won in June 2009. Xavier Bettel, the mayor of the town of Luxembourg has repeated for a long time that he was not personally interested in a ministerial post. He has now changed his stance on this saying that if his party was progressing in the ballot box he would not refuse *"assuming his responsibilities"*. The Democratic Party chose *Deng Stëmm fir d'Zukunft* (Your vote for the future) as its campaign slogan. Unemployment, the State's debt, the sluggish economy, the alarming state of the education system, problems accessing housing and a lack of childcare – these are the themes put forward by Xavier Bettel. The party wants to *"spend less and offer more"*, i.e. rationalise State spending by abolishing certain "gifts" that the State makes to the citizens such as service cheques and the reimbursement of expenses linked to childcare. It supports the upkeep of the wage index after 2014.

What place is there for the Alternative Democratic Reform Party?

The Alternative Democratic Reform Party (ADR), the most rightwing party on the political scale, hopes to improve its 2009 result when it won four seats. The ADR is against capping the index and any increase in VAT; it is defending the present retirement system. It supports the development of the referendum and it intends to simplify the civil service and enable citizens to access the Constitutional Court directly. It is against voting rights for foreigners in general elections and the reduction of the obligatory length of time of residence necessary to obtain Luxembourg nationality down from 7 to 5 years.

Will the ecologists enter government?

The Greens/Dei Greng (LV-DG) want to introduce a *"new citizens contract"*. They support the approval of a law that would restrict the powers, the rights and duties of minis-

ters via the introduction of a code of conduct for political leaders and civil servants, the restriction of the number of successive ministerial mandates (down to two), the reform of the institutions, voting rights for foreigners in the general elections and finally the separation of the State from religion (with the introduction of a voluntary tax to fund the country's various religions).

The Battle of the Far Left

The competition is fierce between the Communist Party (KPL) and the Left/Dei Lenk (LG/DL). The latter chose the following as its campaign slogan *"Elo. Dei Lenk (The Left. Now)"*; deplores that Luxembourg is living under a *"reign of generalised irresponsibility"*. It is focusing its attacks on the POSL/LASP which it accuses of being closer to employers than the unions and of implementing the Democratic Party's liberal policy. The party which stands as the representative of workers' and border workers' interests is fighting for an increase (of 300€) of the minimum wage, likewise the level of taxation of capital revenues. It hopes for the introduction of a more progressive income tax rate. The LG/DL is proud of putting forward young candidates: one third are under 35. It hopes to win between one to four seats.

The Communist Party (KPL), absent from Parliament since 2004, deplores the organisation early general elections. With its slogan *"Man before profit" Social cover of employment for everyone*, the communists are fighting for improved working conditions and better wages; the nationalisation of businesses in the steel industry, energy, telecommunications, transport and banks; a tax reform (the party wants to increase taxes on businesses and specialized investment funds; they support an increase in the means allocated to education and better access to housing).

Two newcomers: the Pirate Party and the Party for Total Democracy

The Pirate Party has published its programme qualified as *"social liberal, even more liberal than the Democratic Party, more social than that of the Socialists and more progressive than the Christian Social People's Party,"* by its chairman Sven Clément. Amongst other things the party is asking for the creation of a basic monthly revenue of 800€ for all - from children to cross-border tax-

payers – a tax reform; the upkeep of banking secrecy; greater State transparency and better access by citizens to information; the defence of marriage between people of the same sex; greater protection of data, the end of obligatory voting; a reduction in the voting age to 16 and the organisation of general elections every four years. The Pirate Party hopes to win 2 seats.

The Party for Total Democracy (PID) was created in June by Jean Colombera, a former ADR member, a party he quit due to differences of opinion with its former chairman Fernand Kartheiser. With the slogan “*Eng iddi méi wäit* (One idea further), Jean Colombera wants to “do politics for the man in the street” applying the principles of holistic medicine to politics. He is however at a disadvantage because he is not very well known.

The Political System

Luxembourg is a constitutional monarchy of which Grand Duke Henri is the present Head of State. Parliament comprises a single chamber, the Chamber of Representatives, with 60 MP’s elected for a five year period by a proportional list system according to the principle of the smallest electoral quota. Independent candidates, considered as a list in their own right are however accepted.

In these general elections the Grand Duchy is divided into four constituencies: the South (Esch-sur-Azette and Capellen) that elects 23 representatives, the Centre (Luxembourg and Mersch) 21 MP’s, the North (Diekirch, Redange, Wiltz, Clervaux and Vianden) 9 MP’s and East (Grevenmacher, Remich and Echternach) 7 representatives. Candidates for the Chamber of Representatives must be at least 21 years old. According to article 135 of the electoral law the lists which want to stand must be presented by 100 voters or an MP in the constituency in which the list is established or by 3 local councillors elected in one or several towns in the constituencies. Each list must be registered at least 60 days before the election.

During the election each voter has as many votes as he has MP’s to elect in his constituency; each of the votes distributed between the candidates of the same list or several different lists are worth one vote. The voter may attribute a vote to each of the candi-

dates on the same list. A person may also vote for candidates from two or several different lists or even «double vote» i.e. voting twice (maximum) for one of the candidates on a list. The voter is free to mix the ways he votes, for example by using the double vote for several candidates from several different lists. Hence during the last general elections on 7th June 2009 48% of the electorate voted for several lists and 38% for various candidates on several lists. The distribution of seats is undertaken according to the Hagenbach-Bischoff method.

It is obligatory to vote in Luxembourg. Luxembourgers living abroad or those aged 75 and over are exempted however. Unjustified abstention is punished by a fine (100-250€). If it happens again within a time span of five years the fine increases from 500-1000€ and the voter may be struck off the electoral roll or even banned from any form of appointment, promotion or distinction. It is impossible to vote by proxy in the Grand Duchy.

All draft laws are put to a double vote in the Luxembourg Parliament. Article 59 of the Constitution makes it obligatory for MP’s to vote twice on a draft law except if the Chamber of Representatives and the State Council decide otherwise. A lapse of at least three months must separate the two votes.

6 political parties are represented in the outgoing Chamber of Deputies:

- the Christian Social People’s Party (PCS/CVS), founded in 1944 and led by Michel Wolter; the PCS/CVS is the part of outgoing Prime Minister Jean-Claude Juncker. It has 26 seats;
- the Socialist Workers’ Party (POSL/LSAP), created in 1902 is a member of the outgoing government coalition. Chaired by Alex Bodry it has 13 seats;
- the Democratic Party (PD/DP), centre-right founded in 1955 and led by Xavier Bettel has 9 seats;
- the Greens/Dei Greng (LV-DG), created in 1983 the leaders of which are Sam Tanson and Christian Kmiotek, has 7 MPs;
- the Alternative Democratic Reform Party (ADR), created in 1987 and led by Roby Mehlen., has 4 seats;
- the Left/Dei Lenk (LG/DL), far left founded in 1999 has 1 MP.

General Election Results of 20th October 2013 in Luxembourg

Turnout: 91.4% (it is obligatory to vote in the Grand Duchy)

Political Parties	No. Of votes won	% of votes won	No. of seats
Christian Social People's Party (PCS/CVS)	1 103 636	33.68	23
Socialist Workers' Party (POSL/LSAP)	664 586	20.28	13
Democratic Party (PD/DP)	597 879	18.25	13
The Greens/Dei Greng (LV-DG)	331 920	10.13	6
Alternative Democratic Reform Party (ADR)	217 683	6.64	3
The Left/Dei Lenk (LG/DL)	161 759	4.92	2
Pirate Party	96 270	2.94	0
Communist Party (KPL)	53 669	1.64	0
Party for Integral Democracy (PID)	49 290	1.51	0

Source : <http://www.elections.public.lu/fr/elections-legislatives/2013/resultats/index.html>

According to the most recent poll by TNS Ilres, published in the Lëtzebuenger Wort and broadcast on the TV/radio channel RTL, the Christian Social People's Party (PCS/CSV) is ahead of its competitors just one month before the election with 33% of voting intentions. The Socialist

Workers' Party (POSL/LASP) and the Democratic Party (PD/DP) are due to win 15% each, the Greens/Dei Greng 10%, the Left/Dei Lenk, 4%. The Alternative Democratic Reform Party (ADR), the Communist Party (KRL) and the Pirate Party are only due to win 1% each.

The Christian Social People's Party of Prime Minister Jean-Claude Juncker in the lead but breakthrough by the Democratic Party in the general elections in Luxembourg

Results

The Christian Social People's Party (PCS/CVS) of outgoing Prime Minister Jean-Claude Juncker and led by Michel Wolter is still the country's leading party: it won 33.68% of the vote and 23 seats (-3 in comparison with the previous general election on 7th June 2009). It drew ahead of the Socialist Workers' Party (POSL/LSAP) of Alex Bodry which won 20.28% of the vote and 13 seats (=). The Democratic Party (PD/DP), led by the Mayor of Luxembourg, Xavier Bettel seems to be the other victor in the election with 18.25% of the vote and 13 seats (+4). Sam Tanson and Christian Kmiotek's Greens/Dei Greng (LV-DG) came fourth with 10.13% of the vote and 6 seats (-1). The Alternative Democratic Reform Party (ADR), led by Roby Mehlen won 6.64% of the vote and 3 seats (-1). The Left/Dei Lenk (LG/DL) won 4.92% and 2 seats (+1). Sven Clement's Pirate Party, the Communist Party (KPL) led by Ali Ruckert and the Party for Integral Democracy (PID) respectively won 2.94%,

1.64% and 1.51% of the vote. The Communists therefore failed to return to the Chamber of Deputies from which they have been absent since 2004 and the leader of the Party for Integral Democracy, Jean Colombera lost his seat. Turnout was almost the same as that registered in the general election on 7th June 2009. It totalled 91.4% (+ 0.5 points).

The general elections of 20th October, initially programmed to take place in May 2014, were only the second to be organised early in the Grand Duchy's history (after those in 1969). They were also the first since 1979 not to have taken place at the same time as the European elections. The vote followed the resignation on 10th July of

Jean-Claude Juncker who lost the support of his government partner, the Socialist Workers' Party. The outgoing Prime Minister had been challenged over his management of the State of Luxembourg's Information Services (SREL) when it was discovered there was a dysfunction within this organisation that was under his responsibility.

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Source : <http://www.elections.public.lu/fr/elections-legislatives/2013/resultats/index.html>

"We are the leading party. There is a major gap between our movement and the two behind us; we are claiming priority to form the next government," declared the outgoing Prime Minister Jean-Claude Juncker when the results were announced; "I see with satisfaction that the Christian Social People's Party is still the country's leading party," stressed Luc Frieden, outgoing Finance Minister adding, "it is however too early to say which coalition will govern the Grand Duchy over the next five years."

Two government coalition possibilities emerge from the results of the election on 20th October: the first might bring together the Christian Social People's Party and the Democratic Party, i.e. the party which came out ahead and the one which gained the most, a coalition

which already governed Luxembourg between 1999 and 2004. The second would rally the Socialist Workers' Party, the Democratic Party and the Greens/Dei Greng, a tripartite coalition unseen since 1964. During the electoral campaign the liberals and the ecologists mentioned that they wanted to oust the outgoing Prime Minister. If they manage to join forces with the socialists the three parties would have a total 32 MPs, i.e. a 2 seat majority in the Chamber of Deputies, the only chamber in parliament.

Jean-Claude Juncker said during the electoral campaign that he was against a government rallying three political groups and said he was ready to govern with the socialists, the liberals or the ecologists. Although Jean-Claude Juncker congratulated the Democratic

General elections in Luxembourg 20th October 2013

Party leader, Xavier Bettel after the election, he does not necessarily have retained happy memories of his previous period in government with the latter. He might renew his government alliance with the Socialist Workers' Party.

"If it is possible to undertake real reforms with a tripartite government in view of modernising the State and giving it renewed impetus I then support a tripartite coalition," indicated the socialist candidate for Prime Minister Etienne Schneider, saying *"I really want to be Prime Minister to provide new energy to the country and to make in depth reforms."*

Liberal leader Xavier Bettel was pleased with the results. *"The electorate has clearly given us a mandate to enter government or to form one."*

"Both parties in the outgoing coalition have been sanctioned," analysed Philippe Poirier, Professor of Political Science at the University of Luxembourg, who is counting on a government coalition uniting the Christian Social People's Party and the Democratic Party. The political analyst believes that the creation of an alliance bringing together the socialists, the liberals and the ecologists will be difficult, even impossible, because of the *"transfer of votes towards the small parties on the left and the decline of the Greens/Dei Greng."*

The wealthiest country in the world (revenue per capita = 112,000 €/annum – is the highest in the world), Luxembourg is experiencing a difficult period however. Unemployment totals 7%, buying power has dropped by 5% since the start of the international economic crisis and the country's debt has tripled over the last fifteen years. Moreover, according to the polls only 12% of Luxembourgers say they trust their politicians. The Christian Social Party campaigned on the need for stability with the slogan *fair an stabil* (fair and stable).

Finally and as of January 2015 the Grand Duchy will accept the automatic exchange of fiscal information on accounts held by non-residents, which means the end of banking secrecy. Fiscal revenues linked to the Luxembourg financial market – the 13th in the world (the country is also the 2nd most important international centre for investment funds after the USA) – represent one third of the country's total revenue.

Grand Duke Henry will appoint the person who he has chosen to form the next Luxembourg government within the next few days. Outgoing Prime Minister Juncker, the European record holder in terms of longevity as government head (he has led the country for the last 18 years) might well return to office.

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