

General Elections in Latvia: the Russian-speaking party loses ground but comes out just ahead of Unity – and the outgoing coalition retains the majority

Corinne Deloy

Results

Abstract :

Harmony Centre (SC) won the general elections that took place in Latvia on 4th October but the party led by the Mayor of Riga, Nils Usakovs who was standing for the first time without his socialist partner achieved a lower score than the one forecast in the polls: 23.13% of the vote and 24 of the 100 seats in the Saeima (Parliament), i.e. 7 seats less in comparison with the previous election on 17th September 2011.

Unity (Vienotiba, V), the main outgoing government coalition party took 2nd place with 21.76% of the vote and 23 seats (+3). The Green and Farmers' Union (ZZS), a member of the outgoing government chaired by Raimonds Vejonis made good progress winning 19.62% of the vote and 21 seats (an additional 8). It came out ahead of the other outgoing government coalition member, the National Alliance (an alliance of the Union for the Homeland and Freedom (TB/LNNK) led by Gaidis Berzins, and of the far right party All for Latvia (VL), led by Ratvis Dzintars), which won 16.57% and 17 seats (+ 3).

Two other parties have made their entry into the Latvian parliament: No sirds Latvijai created by Inguna Sudraba (a former State auditor who is fighting corruption) in January - with 6.88% of the vote and 7 seats as well as the Regions Alliance (Latvijas Reģionu Apvienība, LRA) with 6.55% and 8 seats.

Turnout totalled 58.83%; this is the lowest turnout since Latvia regained its independence in 1991.

The war in Ukraine played a vital role in the electoral campaign. The conflict has rekindled Latvian fear about Moscow's intentions on the Baltic States and security issues

formed the heart of the electoral debates. The Russian/Ukrainian crisis strengthened the government coalition parties in a country where Russian military manoeuvres are the source of major concern. "These general elections are different because of what is happening in Ukraine. The situation is worsening again there and people are worried because we have border with Russia," declared Prime Minister Laimdota Straujuma, adding, "it is important for the country's security that Harmony Centre does not win too many votes (...) I want Latvia's stability." Nils Usakovs recently maintained that Vladimir Putin was "the best president for Russia!"

Result of the general elections on 4th October 2014 in Latvia

Turnout : 58.83%

Political Parties	No of votes won	% of votes won	No of seats
Harmony Centre (SC)	209 762	23,13	24
Unity (Vienotiba, V)	199 044	21,76	23
Greens and Farmers' Union (ZZS)	178 052	19,62	21
National Alliance	151 262	16,57	17

No sirds Latvijai	62 475	6,88	7
Regions Alliance	60 553	6,55	8
Others	56 171	5,49	0

Source : Central Electoral Commission of Latvia http://sv2014.cvk.lv/index_rez.html?lang=1

"We are the winners of the elections and in a democratic country it is normal to ask the winner to form the government," declared one of the leaders of Harmony Centre, Janis Urbanovics. The party which positioned itself on socio-economic issues in the hope of attracting more voters and which stands as a centre-left party which addresses all Latvians, ready to work with all of the other parties failed to maintain all of its seats which was the minimum goal it set itself.

"There is no surprise and the government coalition won major support. I do not think that Unity lost (...). If we add all of the votes of the parties which are members of the outgoing government coalition together we have a convincing majority, » answered the President of the Republic Andris Berzins. "It is a vote of confidence in Unity and in the outgoing government coalition (...) this means that the people want us to continue our work," added the leader of Parliament and leader of Unity, Solvita Aboltina, who was however beaten and will not return to her seat in Parliament.

"People want change but in the present context they are worried," analyses Arnis Kaktins of the pollster SKDS. "The present government will remain in place

and Harmony Centre will stay in the opposition. It is the path we have been following for the last 25 years (...). Ethnicity is the only real division in Latvia. There is no ideology at all in our country," maintained Daunis Auers, professor of political science at the University of Latvia. « Nils Ukakovs and Harmony Centre are the source of major mistrust based on the belief that most of the population that Latvia must be governed by Latvians and that the Russian-speakers have no legitimacy in terms of governing the country, » he added. We should recall that Harmony Centre is associated to United Russia (ER), Vladimir Putin's party via a cooperation agreement.

If the outgoing coalition formed by Unity, the Greens and Farmers' Union and the National Alliance remains in government – maybe be extending to a fourth party – nothing is certain that outgoing Prime Minister Laimdota Straujuma will remain in office. Several analysts believe that President of the Republic Andris Berzins will prefer Andris Piebalgs, European Development Commissioner since 2010 and former Energy Commissioner (2004-2009). A choice that might be explained by the fact that for the first time in its history Latvia will the presidency of the council of the European Union in January 2015.

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