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**Results**

General Elections in Latvia, 2nd October 2010

Unity, the centre right coalition led by outgoing Prime Minister Valdis Dombrovskis easily wins the general elections in Latvia.

The Latvian electorate confounded the pollsters' forecasts by voting massively in support of the coalition Unity (Vienotība) led by outgoing Prime Minister Valdis Dombrovskis in the general elections that took place on 2nd October.

Unity, a three party alliance, New Era (JL), the Head of Government's party led by Solvita Aboltina, Civic Union (PS), chaired by Girts Valdis Kristovskis and Society for Other Politics (SCP) – won 30.72% of the vote and 33 seats in the Saeima, the only chamber in Parliament.

Harmony Centre (SC), a leftwing opposition coalition that rallies the National Harmony Party, New Centre and the Social Democratic Party led by Janis Urbanovics, came second improving its position in comparison with the general election of 7th October 2006 with 25.69% of the vote and 29 seats. The two electoral blocs had been declared to be running neck and neck until the day before the election.

The Farmers and Greens' Union (ZZS), chaired by Augusts Brigmanis which rallies the Union of Latvian Farmers, the Green Party and For Latvia/Ventspils came third with 19.42% of the vote and 22 seats.

For a Good Latvia follows close behind; rallying the People's Party (TP) led by Andris Skele, Latvia's First-Latvian Way (LPP-LC) led by Ainars Slesers, For a Better Latvia and three regional parties won 7.55% of the vote (8 seats), a result equal to that achieved by the National Union alliance comprising Pro Patria Union and Freedom (TB/LNNK) led by Roberts Zile and the far right party All for Latvia (VL).

Finally For Human Rights in a United Latvia (PVTCL), a party that defends the Russian speaking minority which lies to the left of the political scale, failed to rise above the 5% mark of votes cast necessary to be represented in the Saeima, only winning 1.41% of the vote.

Turnout was slightly higher than that recorded in the last general election on 7th October 2006 (+0.72 points) and rose to 62.60%. It was in the Russian speaking areas (Latgale, 52.54%) that the electorate abstained the most. The Latvians, who are extremely disenchanting with their institutions and their politicians and in whom most seem to have lost all confidence, did not stay at home on Election Day.

In their majority the electorate showed they wanted to re-elect their outgoing Prime Minister Valdis Dombrovskis, who conducts an austerity policy, because they believe this is the only solution to put Latvia, which has been sorely affected by the economic crisis, back on track for growth.

"I would like to thank all of those who supported the coalition Unity. They clearly voted for stability and continuity. Several political parties called to reject the repayment of the loan to the international community and the economic stabilisation programme, promising all kinds of miracles," declared Prime Minister Valdis Dombrovskis who qualified the vote as a "pleasant

surprise". He said that the outgoing government had achieved a "convincing majority" which gave it "the legitimacy to continue the work which has been started."

The outgoing government that he was leading brought together, in addition to his own party New Era, the Union of Farmers and Greens which has participated in all government coalitions since the country's independence in 1991 and the Pro-Patria Union and Freedom. "We have discussed further opportunities to work together and we are prepared to continue our work," indicated the outgoing Prime Minister.

"It is a major victory for Valdis Dombrovskis," declared Morten Hansen, Director of the Economics Department at the Stockholm School of Economics in Riga. "We are suffering the worst recession in the EU, the toughest austerity measures and people still say 'we are confident in this man, let him continue'", he added. "It is a superb victory. It is quite surprising in the European context. How voters reacted to the economic crisis? By voting for a Prime Minister who promises them austerity measures," adds Nils Muiznieks, professor of political science at the University of Latvia.

"We cannot ignore or exclude Harmony Centre," said Solvita Aboltina, the New Era leader. "We must think of how we can democratise Parliament and we have to do this with the opposition," she stressed. "We shall discuss matters with all of the political parties including Harmony Centre. There are several issues we have not succeeded in agreeing on until now. But we do not intend to isolate this party," said the outgoing Prime Minister. "It is important to understand how unreasonable it would be to ignore the power and legitimacy that the Harmony Centre has gained via the number of votes it has won," stresses Roberts Kilis of the Stockholm School of Economics in Riga.

Aigars Freimanis, director of pollster Latvijas Fakti is quick to forecast participation by Harmony Centre in the next government coalition. "Bringing Harmony Centre into the government will enable the latter to protect itself from the population's anger when the next budgetary cuts are made," he declares. Janis Urbanovics, the Harmony Centre's leader has already warned: "You are really thinking of forming a government without us? You want early general elections?" he exclaimed,

disappointed at not seeing his party that was in the lead for several months in the polls, win the election.

"We have assumed our responsibilities, we have guaranteed the country's solvency and progressively re-established growth and we must stay on course. But the crisis really is not over and we still have a great deal of work ahead," repeated the Prime Minister as he went to vote. "There is no reason to be euphoric. There is still a great deal of work to be done," he maintained after the results were announced. The rigorousness and sobriety of Valdis Dombrovskis finally convinced voters that the path comprising major sacrifices chosen by the government is the only means to put the country back on its feet and to guarantee Latvians their future.

The main opposition party, Harmony Centre did however promise them to attenuate the social effects of the austerity policy undertaken by the government by re-negotiating the terms of reimbursement of the 5.27 billion lat loan (€7.05 billion) that the International Monetary Fund (€1.30 billion) and the EU (€3.1 billion) granted to Latvia in December 2008. The President of the Republic, Valdis Zatlers, who will soon appoint the next Prime Minister, has already said that the respect of the reimbursement of the loan allocated by the international community will be decisive criteria in his choice. He also said that Harmony Centre's wish to put an end to Latvia's military participation in Afghanistan was incompatible with the occupation of ministerial positions.

A qualified physicist and former economist in chief at the Central Bank of Latvia and former Finance Minister (2002-2004), 39 year-old Valdis Dombrovskis, (he is the youngest Prime Minister in the EU) therefore maintains his post as Prime Minister which he has occupied since 26th February 2009. Elected MP in the general elections of 5th October 2002 after having undertaken a career as a physicist and then economist he was appointed Finance Minister in the government led by Einars Repse (JL) that same year. He left office in 2004 when he resigned from the outgoing coalition and was elected to the European Parliament on 12th June 2004, a post he resigned from in February 2009 to take over as head of the Latvian government.

"This is the most important election since independence because it will decide which way we will turn," declared Sandra Kalniete, former Foreign Minister (2002-2004) and MEP before the election. The Latvians have therefore chosen continuity, synonymous with a painful austerity policy and they have shown political maturity by re-electing the outgoing coalition. This is the second re-election of a centre-right government in Latvia since 2006.

Apart from structural reform vital for the Latvian economy the next government will have to reduce the 2011 budget by 6% to guarantee the country's future, "a difficult task" according to Valdis Dombrovskis himself.

General Election Results 2nd October in Latvia

Turnout: 62.60%

Political Parties	No of votes won	% of votes cast	No of seats
Unity (V)	300 328	30.72	33
Harmony Centre (SC)	251 148	25.69	29
Farmers and Greens (ZZS)	189 837	19.42	22
For a Better Latvia	73 798	7.55	8
National Union	73 792	7.55	8
For Human Rights in a United Latvia (PVTCL)	13 824	1.41	0
Others	40 149	4.11	0

Source : Internet Site of the Central Electoral Commission of Latvia (<http://www.velesanas2010.cvk.lv>)

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