

New Unity of outgoing Prime Minister Krisjanis Karins wins the general elections in Latvia

New Unity (JV), the party of outgoing Prime Minister Krisjanis Karins, came out ahead in the 1 October general elections in Latvia. It won 18.97% of the vote and 26 of the 100 seats in the Saeima, the single chamber of Parliament (+18 compared to the previous general elections of 6 October 2018). The context of the war in Ukraine in which this election was organised certainly played a major role in the victory of the first Latvian head of government to remain in power after a full four-year legislature. National security issues dominated the electoral campaign.

The Union of Greens and Farmers (ZZS), the party of Ventspils mayor Aivars Lembergs, came second with 12.51% and 16 seats (+5). Next came the United List (AS), an alliance of Green and conservative environment parties, with 10.88% and 15 seats; the National Alliance (AN), led by Raivis Dzintars, with 9.27% and 13 seats; For Stability! (S!), a populist party formed from a split with Harmony and led by Aleksejs Rosļikovs, which garnered 6.83% and won 11 seats.

Latvia First (LPV), the right-wing party of Ainars Slesers, garnered 6.24% and 9 seats; The Progressives (P), a social-democratic party, entered the Saeima with 6.16% and 10 elected members.

The context of the war also explains the rout of the Russian-speaking party, Harmonie (S), the first opposition party for ten years. It did not pass the 5% threshold of votes required to be represented in Parliament. Its leader, Janis Urbanovics, had however taken a position in favour of Ukraine, whereas in 2014, Harmony had chosen to remain

neutral during the invasion of Crimea by the Russian army and the party had maintained its links with the Russian leader Vladimir Putin. *"We had a responsibility to be the first to say that Russia was the aggressor and to condemn it. Many of our voters and members thought it was in our interest to keep quiet, but the Russian leadership is really acting in a criminal way. We have not changed, it is Russia that has changed."*

"With the war in Ukraine, the Russian-speaking population was more or less obliged to assert its loyalty," said Céline Bayou, editor-in-chief of the French online magazine Regard sur l'Est. Russia's invasion of Ukraine has divided Latvia's Russian speakers. *"Harmony had to make a choice between acting responsibly (on the war in Ukraine) or playing populist with national security and state interests. Some of our voters stayed at home, others went to vote for new parties that represent a different geopolitical orientation,"* stressed MEP Nils Ushakovs, former leader of Harmony (2005-2019) and former mayor of Riga (2009-2019) to explain this result.

"The Russian invasion of Ukraine helped the outgoing Prime Minister Krisjanis Karins because at such times people tend to rally around the flag," said political scientist Marcis Krastins. *"Russian-speaking voters were able to transcend their identity and voted in favour of Latvian parties. This is very positive,"* said political scientist Filips Rajevskis.

The Russian Union of Latvia (LKS), the party of Tatiana Zdanoka and Miroslavs Mitrofanovs, which has not been represented in Parliament since 2006,

General elections in Latvia

1st October 2022

suffered the same fate as Harmony. The party refused to condemn Moscow following the Russian army's aggression against Ukraine. It said it deplored the state of war and called on Kyiv and the West to find ways to stop the fighting.

Turnout stood at 59.26%, above the 6 October 2018 vote (+4.5 points). This is the highest turnout since the 17 September 2011 general elections.

Results of the 1 October 2022 general elections in Latvia

Turnout: 59.26%

Political Parties	No of votes won	% of votes cast	No of seats
New Unity (JV)	169 829	18,97	26
Green and Farmers' Union (ZZS)	112 138	12,51	16
United List (AS)	97 482	10,88	15
National Alliance (AN)	83 121	9,27	13
For Stability (S !)	61 243	6,83	11
Latvia First (LPV)	55 936	6,24	9
The Progressives (P)	55 184	6,16	10
Development/For ! (AP !)	44 815	4,97	0
Harmony	43 114	4,81	0
Others	173 382	19,35	0

Source : [Latvian Electoral Commission](#)

The parties of the outgoing government coalition (New Unity, National Alliance, and the Conservatives (K)) together do not hold an absolute majority of seats in the Seima. Krisjanis Karins will therefore have to find new allies to ensure a stable majority: *"New Unity will not form a government coalition with the parties that have their political orientations prescribed in Russia and we will not collaborate with the Union of Greens and Farmers either. Other options are open."*

He said that collaboration with the Union of Greens and Farmers would only be possible if the party broke with the oligarch and mayor of Ventspils Aivars Lembergs. Lembergs has been on bail since February after appealing his conviction on 22 February 2021 for corruption, money laundering and abuse of power to five years in prison, a €20,000 fine and the confiscation of several of his assets (worth tens of millions €). The mayor of Ventspils is also on the list of people involved in the Panama Papers (the name given to documents released by a whistle-blower that

revealed in 2016 the names of several personalities around the world who used offshore companies to launder money or carry out capital evasion).

"The outgoing coalition government is plural. The Prime Minister needs to broaden his support base to function safely. Krisjanis Karins could rely on the Progressives," said political scientist Filips Rajeviskis.

Krisjanis Karins, 57, was born in Wilmington, USA, and has a degree in linguistics from the University of Pennsylvania. In 2002, he was elected Member of Parliament for the New Era party (JL). Two years later, he became Minister of Economic Affairs in the government led by Aigars Kalvitis (People's Party, TP), a position from which he resigned in 2006. He was then elected to the European Parliament in the elections of 6 June 2009 and re-elected MEP in the elections of 24 May 2014.

In January 2019, he was entrusted by the President of the Republic Raimonds Vejonis with the task of

forming the government following the general elections of 6 October 2018. The coalition he formed included New Unity, National Alliance, Development/For!, Who Owns the State (Kam pieder valsts? (KPV?)) and the Conservatives. Krisjanis Karins won the confidence of the Saeima majority on 23 January and became Prime Minister.

On 1 October, Latvians chose stability by giving a majority of votes to New Unity and by choosing to keep Krisjanis Karins as Prime Minister in these difficult uncertain times (inflation has risen to 22.5% in Latvia, the second highest rate in the European Union behind Estonia, 24.2%).

You can read all of our publications on our site :
www.robert-schuman.eu

Publishing Director : Pascale JOANNIN

THE FONDATION ROBERT SCHUMAN, created in 1991 and acknowledged by State decree in 1992, is the main French research centre on Europe. It develops research on the European Union and its policies and promotes the content of these in France , Europe and abroad. It encourages, enriches and stimulates European debate thanks to its research, publications and the organisation of conferences. The Foundation is presided over by Mr. Jean-Dominique Giuliani