

## 12 Saeima Parliamentary Election Results

Riga - Klāvs Zichmanis

Using exit poll data, post-election analysis began Saturday immediately after the polls closed. Unity (Vienotība 'V') appeared in first place at 23%, Green Farmers Union (Zaļo Zemnieku Savienība 'ZZS') second, Harmony (Saskaņa 'S') third, then the National Association (Nacionālā Apvienība 'NA'), Heart of Latvia (No Sirds Latvijai 'NSL') and the Latvian Region Association (Latvijas Reģionu Apvienība 'NRA'), all parties that exceeded the 5% threshold. Since 27% of the respondents did not reveal their vote, the exit polls did not reflect the voters' true choice. The first election results appeared after 10:00 PM; the picture changed dramatically. S came first at 24% of the vote, ZZS second and V third. But by Sunday morning all Latvian and foreign polls had been counted, except a few in Europe and North America, and the picture changed again. S was still first with 23.3% of the vote, but V was now second with 21.6%, ZZS third at 19.7%, NA at 16.5%, NSL at 6.9%, and LRA last with 6.4%. The participation rate was 59% of eligible voters, about the same as in the 2011 election.

The Latvian Diaspora's order of party popularity differed: V, NA, LRA, S, ZZS, and the NSL. In the 11th parliamentary elections about 28% of eligible voters participated. This time estimates were closer to 24%, although the numbers of eligible voters had increased.

The seven small parties, polling less than 5%, won 5.5% of the popular vote, so the five seats will be distributed proportionally to the victorious parties. Since none of these parties won over 2% support, none are eligible for state party funding.

The biggest winners since the 11th Saeima elections are the ZZS, up 6%, Unity and NA each gained 3%, but Harmony lost 5% support. Voters looked for stability in uncertain times. As well, the majority disagreed with Russian aggression in Ukraine. If in 2011 the difference between the first (Harmony Centre) and the second largest party (Reform) was 8% or 9 MP's, this time the difference between 1st and 2nd (S & V) is slightly more than 2%, or 1 MP, which means S will lose influence in Latvia and abroad. The overall support in parliamentary elections in Riga for Russian parties has fallen since 2011 from 42.6% to 38.4% in 2014.

MP's in the 12th Saeima are distributed as follows: S - 24, V - 23, ZZS - 21, NA - 17, LRA - 8, and NSL - 7. Current coalition partners (V, ZZS, NA) emphasize there is no need to increase the number of parties in the coalition, having a comfortable majority with 61 out of 100 MP's. Being the largest party, S insists it has the right to form the new government. The two small parties are willing to cooperate with everyone. There are several mathematical possibilities in forming the next government other than the current coalition: a S led government without V or NA - 60; a V government without S or ZZS - 55; a ZZS government without S or V - 53, and so on.

However, the first attempt to form a government will be made by the current group - V, ZZS and NA. Lembergs (an ardent ZZS supporter) wants to ensure himself security from prosecution and access to power, which the ZZS will guarantee. Reformists with new ideas and different political views were not elected or were sidelined. This coalition is unlikely to support change, opting to leave things as is. This will mean excluding S from power, which will enhance and continue S disintegration as a party. President Bērziņš chances to stay in office for a second term are

improved. But this government will have to pay for its decisions. In the current geopolitical climate, S ally Russia will not like S being left outside the coalition. The result could be riots, new accusations of all sorts to Latvia, interference in Latvia's internal affairs, or other provocations. In the first half of 2015 Latvia holds EU chairmanship, a situation which Russia will try to use to its advantage. Russia is not ready to lose. In this situation, an S inclusive government can become a reality.

LRA party strength was a surprise. Support seemingly comes from two groups: one, municipalities outside Rīga versus Riga - 'Riga ignores us and only thinks of itself'. The second group are the young. They want new and different politics, they want change, and see this possibility in the LRA. What underlines this idea is LRA candidate Artuss Kaimiņš. A rock radio station personality hosting the show "The Dog House", he is an aggressive political commentator and critic. His direct language, wit and sharp pointed questioning of politicians speaks to a younger demographic and the young at heart.

Sudraba's party NSL has been extensively examined and analyzed. Only one question remained: will it overcome the 5% barrier and by how much. If the current coalition holds for four years, Sudraba stands a good chance of never having to answer the question of whether NSL would form a coalition with S.

But there are positive signs for the future. This might be the last election where the Soviet-minded, stuck in the past, and haters of positive change, the Soviet-style old guard, dominate Latvian politics. The post-Soviet political reformist generation legitimized itself in the outgoing parliament as capable, ready and able to lead the country forward. Time is on their side.