

## Quo Vadis?

Klavs Zichmanis – 8 October 2011

Uncertainty dominated the last week of September about who would form the next coalition. V and ZRP had agreed that jointly they would select the third coalition member, either the NA or SC. Clarity unexpectedly materialized early Saturday morning. The ZRP reported that after a nine hour discussion "the Board decided unanimously to invite V and the SC to jointly form the next government". The report was false since there was no unanimous consensus and there had been no vote on this decision. Saturday morning much of Latvian society was confused and resentful.

What led to the decision to go with the SC? The most important person in the ZRP nucleus is the presidential adviser on legal matters, Sandra Sondore Kukule, who held the same position under President Vaira Vike-Freiberga. Zatlers appreciates Sondore Kukule and takes her advice. However, Latvian society considers her controversial because of several unpleasant incidents. Her husband is a businessman with contacts in Russian business circles. President Berzinš has expressed the desirability of a broad coalition. Her husband's contacts, her debts or for some other unknown reason, Kukule is aggressively pushing ZRP in the direction of the SC.

Another reason could be personal. Zatlers' deeply humiliating experience at the beginning of his presidency ("the zoological garden President" ), the loss of prestige and reputation, from which he gradually recovered, he came to the conclusion that a voter, rather than Parliament elected President is essential. This conviction became part of the ZRP election platform, which requires changing the Constitution, and which in turn requires a significant majority in parliament. With the SC, the ZRP and V coalition would have the necessary quorum in parliament.

Opposition to Saturday's statement in the party is unambiguous. Most of the deputies and party members are opposed. The party may split, the rebellious deputies forming their own parliamentary faction, and in the first few days after the announcement Zatlers lost credibility among the electorate. If the voter elected president idea is passed, the odds of Zatlers being elected again is negligible and his career as a politician would be over.

Aivars Ozolins wrote in the magazine *Ir*, "On election night Aivars Lembergs phoned from Ventspils to tell his defeated party (ZZS) the future rules of the game - SC must form the government with the ZRP." If that's true, this may be another reason for the ZRP move towards SC. Kukule and others in the party may be implementing Lembergs' plan to continue protecting his interests.

To the oligarch and SC autocratic forces, either of two potential outcomes is a win win situation: the SC could be in government, or if not, the ZRP and other parties opposed to them can be destroyed as a political force. Without a unified ZRP, the Coalition for Justice does not have 51 + members in parliament. However, if the SC and the remaining members of ZRP form the core of a coalition, they will need ZZS as a third partner. If Zatlers goes along with this version, his self imposed 'red line' policy of not including the ZZS will lose him any remaining credibility he may still have and he may become a political zero.

The power of V has increased. It has Prime Minister candidate Dombrovskis whom both the SC and ZRP want to be PM. If this continues, V can build a coalition at its discretion. The initiative is already in its hands, and V would rather have the NA than the SC as a partner, leaving the door open to the ZRP.

The ZRP left an opening through which the party can still escape and save itself from being painted into a corner. Its announcement is an 'appeal' to build a ZRP, V and SC coalition. It may fail and some other one created. However, at this point it looks like V has the upper hand. The NA has to promise to 'behave' because the V faction SCP (society for different politics) does not want to collaborate with the NA. President Bērziņš has given to the end of the week for the parties themselves to form a coalition before he takes over this process. The tendency in Latvia is to speak in unclear language, to be indecisive, and push responsibility to others thus needlessly complicating the political process. Who will form the government is still unclear, but Zatlers' hope of becoming Chairman of the Saeima (Speaker) is compromised, and as a politician he seems to be hanging on by a thread.