

# 2018 Parliamentary Elections in Latvia

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- The elections to the 13th Saeima took place on 6 October. All the political parties represented in parliament suffered – in some case dramatic – losses. Seven parties will be represented in the new parliament. Voter turnout was extremely low, at 55 per cent.
- The ruling right-wing coalition, consisting of the Union of Greens and Farmers, the nationalist National Alliance and the UNITY party, suffered a serious setback and lost its majority. All three government parties lost around half of their seats.
- The clear winners in the election are new parties that will be represented in parliament for the first time: the recently founded KPV.LV, which could be described as the Latvian version of the Italian Five Stars Movement; the anti-corruption nationalist New Conservative party (JKP); and the left-liberal 'Attīstībai/PAR' (AP).
- The strongest force in parliament remains 'Saskaņa', the main representative of the Latvia's Russian-speaking electorate. Its share of the vote shrank from 23 to 19.8 per cent. Saskaņa will have the largest faction in the Saeima, but probably remain in opposition.
- The new Saeima is more fragmented than ever. The right to nominate the prime minister lies with the state president. Multiple coalition set-ups are possible but it will probably consist of five parties and include extremely diverse ideological positions. It remains to be seen whether the newly elected parliament will be capable of producing a stable and predictable government.

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## Politics in Latvia: Overview

Latvia has a parliamentary system with a directly elected legislature and an executive that emerges from the legislature and is answerable to it. At the centre of the Latvian political system stands the parliament (*Saeima*), directly elected by citizens for a four-year term. The *Saeima*, a unicameral legislature, has 100 members, elected by means of proportional representation based on party lists. The parliament appoints the head of state – the president – for a four-year term; the successful candidate must have the support of an absolute majority of MPs. The Cabinet of Ministers must be approved by the *Saeima*. Candidates for prime minister (or president), however, must be nominated by the current president, who usually makes his decision after consultations with parliament. Only then can a parliamentary vote take place. The Latvian parliament usually includes from six to eight parliamentary groups and, because no party has obtained an absolute majority of parliamentary seats, the country has experienced only coalition governments, many of them short-lived. Since the restoration of independence in 1990, Latvia has had 19 different governments.

The decisive influence of the *Saeima* sometimes raises the question of whether the principle of separation of powers is observed in Latvia. But although the parliament is powerful, there are institutions that balance its power. First, the president not only has the right to initiate the dissolution of the parliament, but they also perform functions that usually belong to second chambers in bicameral systems: they have the right of suspensive veto on all legislation, as well as the right to initiate referendums. These rights are used relatively often, the most prominent case being the referendum about some dubious security legislation, initiated by President Vaira Vīķe-Freiberga in 2007. The President has also the right to nominate a candidate for prime minister, which can be crucial in a country in which governments change frequently. Second, the court system is independent and has the instrument of judicial review at its disposal, especially since the strong and independent Constitution-

al Court (*Satversmes tiesa*) was established in Latvia in 1996, which often decides on important political issues.

Executive powers in Latvia are executed by a single executive body, the Cabinet of Ministers. The number of ministries can be changed for political reasons. There have been cases in which ministries or the secretariats of specially assigned ministers were created in order to satisfy all coalition partners. Currently, there are thirteen ministries in Latvia.

## Electoral System and Political Parties

The one hundred members of the *Saeima* are elected by a proportional representation system based on party lists with a 5 per cent threshold for a four-year term. Latvia has five electoral districts (Kurzeme, Vidzeme, Latgale, Zemgale and the capital Riga), and the number of deputies to be elected in a district depends on the number of voters living there before the election. Seats are allocated in accordance with a modified Saint-Laguë formula. If a voter puts a plus mark next to the name of a candidate this indicates special support. If a voter does not support a candidate included on the ballot paper, however, they may cross out the name of this candidate. The voter may also insert an unaltered (unannotated) ballot paper into the ballot envelope. Until the 2006 *Saeima* elections, a candidate could run for their party list in all five electoral districts simultaneously. Votes cast for a party in all five districts were added together. This led to the so-called »locomotive« phenomenon, with a few well-known and popular persons pulling a bunch of practically unknown deputies into parliament. This legislation was changed in 2009 and now each candidate is attached to a single electoral district.

Only political parties can participate in parliamentary elections; no other groups, such as voters' alliances, are allowed. Several legal acts regulate the activities of political parties. In 2006, the *Saeima* adopted the Political Parties Act, which extensively regulates the founding, operations and dissolution of parties. This law serves as

the legal basis of party life in Latvia. There are also other acts regulating party activities. First, there is the Financing Political Organizations (Parties) Act, which has been the subject of heated debate and significant amendments since its adoption in 1995. There are also legal acts regulating political campaigning before parliamentary and municipal elections, as well as before European Parliament elections.

There is an official registration procedure in Latvia for political parties; only registered parties can participate in elections. Among other conditions, this requires payment of a deposit of 1400 euros, which is returned if the party manages to get into parliament. There is a 5 per cent threshold (raised from 4 per cent in 1998) for seats in the Latvian parliament. Non-citizens of Latvia and citizens of other EU countries can be members of political parties in Latvia. One and the same person cannot be a member of more than one political party, however. In 2016, the Saeima adopted a rule that in order to participate in parliamentary elections the party must have been in existence for at least one year and have at least 500 members.

### Party Landscape, Leadership and Forecasts

The last Saeima election, in 2014, took place in a friendly, cooperative atmosphere and did not bring about any fundamental changes. The turnout was 58.8 per cent, a slight decrease from the previous elections of 2011, when the figure was 59.8 per cent. This decrease was not interpreted as a sign of growing political passivity, however, but attributable rather to outward migration. Immediately after the election, the state president, Andris Bērziņš, stated that the work of the current right-wing ruling coalition had been appreciated by the electorate and thus its mandate had been renewed. Back in 2014, the president's statement could have been regarded as true. Indeed, the ruling centre-right coalition, consisting of three parties – »*Vienotība*« (Unity), the Union of Greens and Farmers (ZZS) and the National Alliance, which had ruled the country previously, was returned to power.

Now, however, the situation has changed. The main right-centre party *Vienotība* (Unity), which had led the government since 2009, lost power in 2016. Now the government is led by the catch-all Union of Greens and Farmers (ZZS) and its Prime Minister Māris Kučinskis. *Vienotība* has virtually collapsed, mainly due to internal struggles and lack of effective leadership.

New parties have emerged to fill the gap left by the collapse of *Vienotība* and to attract its former electorate, however. There are several contenders. First of all, the *Jaunā Konservatīvā partija* (JKP, New Conservative Party) has emerged as a significant player. It is led by the former Justice minister Jānis Bordāns and its main issue is anti-corruption, the beloved campaign theme of *Vienotība*. In JKP, Bordāns has been joined by two former investigators of the Latvian anti-corruption police (KNAB), Juta Striķe and Juris Jurašs, who present themselves as principled fighters for transparency and integrity in politics. The party is strongly pro-EU and NATO.

Another political start-up is the liberal »*Attīstībai/PAR!*« ("For Development"/FOR"), which is trying to attract the (economic) liberal part of *Vienotība*'s former electorate. Although the party is supported by a few wealthy businesspeople, it promotes a left-liberal agenda of social equality, universal availability of high-quality public services and minority rights. »*Attīstībai/PAR!*« is probably the most »European« of the Latvian parties: it openly defends deeper integration in European structures. It also has a few fairly popular and experienced political figures, such as former minister of foreign affairs Artis Pabriks and the charismatic former MP Mārtiņš Bondars. Their previous experience contrasts with the image of the party as the »party of the young and different«, however.

Finally, among the new parties one should mention the populist initiative **KPV.LV**, led by the sociopathic former stage actor Artuss Kaimiņš. This party has no ideology except aggressive anti-elitism; the current low approval ratings Latvia's traditional parties mean that KPV.LV can profit from a protest vote. Interestingly, the electorate of this purely populist project seems to be immune

to negative news stories about Kaimiņš and other party leaders, including corruption, conflicts of interest and misuse of public office. This is largely a Trumpian approach to politics, in which a colourful public personality is able to exploit popular anti-elitist sentiments and anger. The party has no clearly formulated agenda for Latvian foreign policy.

Alongside these political start-ups, there are the traditional players of the Latvian politics, which will probably get the majority of votes in the October elections. These are: ZZS, the National Alliance »Visu Latvijai! – TB/LNNK« and the Social Democratic Party »Saskaņa«. **ZZS** is a post-communist alliance of agrarians and greens, whose principal base is in the countryside. This party has a few popular figures, such as Prime Minister Kučinskis, the former weight-lifter-turned-defence-minister Raimonds Bergmanis, as well as the young and talented finance minister Dana Reizniece-Ozola, who recently managed to implement a fairly substantial tax reform. The party is often seen as corrupt, however, mainly due to its links with the most (in)famous Latvian »oligarch«, the mayor of Ventspils port city Aivars Lembergs.

**National Alliance »Visu Latvijai! – TB/LNNK«** is a right-wing Latvian nationalist party, whose main function is to oppose all things seemingly Soviet and/or Russian. Like ZZS, the party has been part of most ruling coalitions since early 2000s and usually has veto power over all »identity« issues, such as language and citizenship policy, minority rights, and so on.

**The social democratic party »Saskaņa« (Concord)** is actually the party of Latvian Russian-speakers, and since 2011 it has had the largest parliamentary faction. The party has succeeded in consolidating the Russian-speaking vote, but it has never been part of a ruling coalition. None of the other parties is willing to enter a coalition with *Saskaņa* because of their strong differences of opinion on a number of fairly substantial issues, such as language policy (*Saskaņa* wants to increase the use of Russian in the public sector), history (*Saskaņa* is much more positive towards the Soviet period

of Latvian history) and geopolitics (*Saskaņa* is widely seen as having pro-Kremlin sympathies). There have been quite significant changes in the party's electoral lists, however. The party's candidate for prime minister this year is the US-educated economist Vjačeslavs Dombrovskis, who has served both as the minister of the economy and the minister of education in several right-wing governments. Importantly, the leading positions on *Saskaņa*'s lists have been filled this year by fairly prominent ethnic Latvians, such as education expert Evija Papule or former minister of transport Anrijs Matīss. This could make *Saskaņa* more acceptable to some Latvian-speaking voters. Nevertheless, it will probably remain in opposition for the next four years. The party will remain politically isolated despite its energetic attempts to change its profile to that of a European-style social democratic party.

Genuine European-style social democracy is represented in Latvian politics by the splinter party **»Progresīvie« (The Progressives)**, which pursues a Latvian version of a left-liberal agenda. Unfortunately, the party's electoral weight has been constantly below 3 per cent. This is probably due to its ideological purism and lack of publicly visible personalities; the party's new leader, Roberts Putnis, former head of the local branch of Transparency International, is the only exception here.

In this parliamentary election *Saskaņa* also has a more radical competitor, **»Latvijas Krievu savienība« (LKS, Russian Union of Latvia)**. This is an openly pro-Kremlin splinter party, which supports the Russian annexation of Crimea and Russian as the second state language in Latvia, while opposing Latvian membership of NATO, among other things. Its electorate consists of those (mainly elderly) Latvian Russian-speakers who still have not accepted an independent, pro-Western Latvia as a reality. This year, however, the list of the Russian Union of Latvia is led by a popular TV journalist turned MEP, Andrejs Mamikins. Along with the party's traditional leader Tatjana Ždanoka (who is not allowed to take part in the election due to her involvement in anti-independence activities in the early 1990s), Mamikins may yet manage to lead the party into parliament.

Finally, there is also a chance that the remnants of the centre-right *Vienotība*, rebranded as »*Jaunā Vienotība*« (New Unity) will get into the next parliament. The main resource of *Jaunā Vienotība* is its experience in government, and some government ministers, such as Minister of Foreign Affairs Edgars Rinkēvičs or Minister of the Interior Rihards Kozlovskis are quite popular. After nine years in government, however, the party looks weak and tired, and its current leader, the Minister of the Economy Arvils Ašeradens, is clearly a failure.

The next Saeima will be very fragmented. Extreme fragmentation, in turn, would lead to the emergence of a very weak and permanently unstable government. Such a development would have a negative impact on the reform capacity of the Latvian executive. Because reforms are urgently needed in many areas, such as regional policy, health care, education and science, such fragmentation would be particularly painful. If the next government is both fissiparous and staffed by unqualified populists there will be no progress in any of these areas.

## Topics and Themes

The Russian annexation of Crimea and the war in Eastern Ukraine have reinforced **the ethnic and geopolitical cleavages** in Latvian politics. Hence the main issue of the election campaign is the »Russian threat«, which commonly translates into the prospect of *Saskaņa*'s participation in government. All significant Latvian parties have sworn emphatically that they will not cooperate with *Saskaņa* after the election; only the populist KPV.LV does not entirely exclude such a possibility. Any coalition with *Saskaņa* seems highly improbable, however. First of all, it is unlikely that *Saskaņa* and KPV.LV could attain an absolute majority and no other partner would join such a coalition. Secondly, even if KPV.LV decides to go for a coalition with *Saskaņa*, it is unlikely to be able to make it work. As a newly created populist party it includes a very diverse group of people, most of whom are happy to bandwagon on the popularity of Artuss Kaimiņš. Most of them would not support taking

such an unpopular step as »fraternising with the Russians«, however, especially, when a different coalition is possible.

All Latvian parties are pro-EU and most also support the country's participation in NATO (LKS and probably *Saskaņa* being exceptions here). European issues are not very central or controversial in this election. The most widely mentioned EU-related issues are the next EU budget, especially agricultural subsidies to Latvia, and the acceptance of asylum-seekers. Although the last-mentioned topic has lost most of its salience since the 2015 crisis, it is still debated in Latvia. The general attitude towards accepting asylum-seekers is rather conservative and sceptical; nevertheless, no racist or xenophobic parties have any chance of getting into the next Saeima. The 2 per cent defence budget called for by NATO was adopted by the previous parliament and this topic will not provoke much controversy. Many parties have announced plans to fight Russian propaganda and »soft power«, to be done mainly by restricting access to Kremlin-controlled TV channels, which are widely watched in Latvia.

Another campaign issue alongside foreign and security policy is **public services**, first of all, education and health care. Although the Latvian economy has been doing quite well in recent years, access to education and health care has not really improved. The quality of education is quite poor in Latvia, and many youngsters are leaving the country to get a decent college degree elsewhere, many of whom will not come back. There are also important problems in health care. This sector has been chronically underfinanced and money flows inside the system are often opaque. Health care reform proposed by ZZS health minister Anda Čakša proposes to condition the availability of publically financed health care on a person's social security contributions. This reform would probably leave a substantial part of the Latvian population without health care and has been widely criticised as »neoliberal« and »inhuman«.

The availability of public services is closely linked to **regional policy** in Latvia. Due to the depopulation of the countryside and high levels of outward

migration from Latvia, many municipalities have become unsustainable, with some rural communes having as few as 1500 inhabitants. No credible plan has been put forward by the ruling ZZS, which has a strong electoral base on the countryside. Some parties, such as *Attīstībai/Par!* or *Jaunā Vienotība*, have announced rather bold reform plans, which would substantially cut the number of municipalities. Others have proposed to introduce higher-level municipalities. No party has a credible roadmap for implementing such reforms, however, which would surely meet with widespread resistance from local government.

**Tax policy** is also a topic of debate. The quality of the debate on taxation and fiscal issues is fairly low, however. The government recently implemented a tax reform, which was also intended to narrow income inequalities by introducing a progressive personal Income tax and other measures. At present the system seems to be doing reasonably well, although the first substantive results of the reform remain to be seen. Nevertheless, there are multiple proposals to change it, for example, by lowering VAT, cancelling the real estate tax for people's primary homes and so on. Most such proposals are openly populist, however, not based on any macroeconomic analysis or other arguments. Although social justice is still a very popular slogan in Latvia, there is very little expert analysis of how a more just Latvian economy could be created without endangering economic growth.

**Minority rights** are usually debated in the context of the integration of Russian-speakers and so the issue is often treated from the perspective of national security and hybrid warfare. *Attīstībai/Par!*, however, has put forward the topic of same-sex partnerships, previously a taboo for most Latvian politicians. Latvia is currently among the most conservative European countries with regard to LGBT rights and will probably remain so for the foreseeable future. Nevertheless, this topic has been raised in political debate, which will probably increase its salience in the future.

## The Campaign

This year's election campaign is very intense. The main reason is the recent dissolution of *Vienotība*, which leaves a significant part of the centre-right vote without its »natural« representative. In 2010, 2011 and 2013, there were 13 party lists at election time; this time there are 16. Parties are widely using new technologies and social media in order to get the voters' attention. While in 2014 the internet still was only a supplement to »old-style« electoral campaigns, now it is moving to the centre of the stage. This has led to some interesting phenomena. First of all, there has been an increase in »volunteer« activism in social networks, mainly Facebook, with people creating and promoting election-related content. Smear campaigns are widely popular, with many »traditional« media, such as newspapers or TV channels, picking up content from social networks. The new populist initiative, KPV.LV, uses the internet widely for live streams, demotivators, immediate responses and so on. NA and *Saskaņa* are also doing this. Most of the establishment parties, such as ZZS and *Jaunā Vienotība*, are much less advanced in producing web content.

There has been a major increase in »leaks« of different kinds, intended to discredit a particular party or candidate. Recorded phone calls by Artuss Kaimiņš have been leaked in which he debates politically sensitive issues with his main »mentor«, Aldis Gobzems, and uses bad language when talking to his girlfriend. The bank transcripts of two NA leaders, Raivis Dzintars and Imants Parādnieks, have also been leaked by a political competitor, Juris Jurašs, who accused them of taking bribes. The Latvian anti-corruption agency KNAB refused to launch a prosecution, however. It does not seem that any of these incidents will have a significant impact on the election outcome. There is a widespread fear of possible Russian interference with the election (the government even established a special working group to deal with it). Currently there are no indications that anything like has been taking place, however.

## Election Results and Lessons Learned

The elections to the 13th Saeima took place on 6 October, 2018. The organization of the elections ran smoothly; as usual, there were no significant procedural problems. Generally, the voting did not deliver any major surprises; however, some of its outcomes were rather unexpected. It remains to be seen whether the newly elected parliament will be capable of producing a stable and predictable government. Many of the trends observed in recent Latvian elections are typical of recent European and global developments, such as the shrinking turnout and the rise of populist parties.

First of all, the incumbent ruling right-wing coalition, consisting of the Union of Greens and Farmers, the nationalist National Alliance and the UNITY party, suffered a serious setback and lost its majority. Although none of the government

parties was voted out of parliament, all three government parties lost around half their seats. Most of the lost votes went to new parties: the recently founded KPV.LV, which could be described as the Latvian version of the Italian Five Stars Movement; the anti-corruption nationalist New Conservative party (JKP), which is also represented in the Latvian parliament for the first time; and the left-liberal *Attīstībai/PAR* (AP). The left-democratic *PROGRESĪVIE* ('The Progressives') did not manage to win any seats in the parliament, although it did rather well with 2.61 per cent, when compared with most recent opinion polls, which gave it around 1–1.5 per cent.

The strongest force remains the Social Democratic party *Saskaņa* ('Concord'), the main representative of Latvia's Russian-speaking electorate. Although the party will have about the same number of MPs (23), its share of the vote shrank from

Table 1.  
Latvian election statistics

Party	Votes	Share	Seats	Election result 2014	Difference
Social Democratic Party 'Saskaņa' ('Concord')	167,117	19.80%	23	23.13%	-3.33%
'KPV LV'	120,264	14.25%	16	-	+14.25%
New Conservative Party (JKP)	114,694	13.59%	16	0.7%	+12.89%
'Attīstībai/Par!' (AP)	101,685	12.04%	13	-	+12.04%
National Alliance 'Visu Latvijai!'– 'Tēvzemei un Brīvībai/LNNK' (NA)	92,963	11.01%	13	16.57%	-5.56%
Union of Greens and Farmers (ZZS)	83,675	9.91%	11	19.62%	-9.71%
'New UNITY'	56,542	6.69%	8	21.76%	-14.98%
Latvian Association of Regions (LRA)	35,018	4.14%	0	6.55%	-2.41%
Russian Union of Latvia (LKS)	27,014	3.20%	0	1.58%	+1.62%
'PROGRESĪVIE'	22,078	2.61%	0	-	+2.61



23 to 19.8 per cent. This may indicate a gradual decline of the party, which was also seen in the 2017 municipal elections. In the recent election, *Saskaņa* also lost votes to the radical pro-Kremlin splinter party *The Russian Union of Latvia* (LKS), which did rather well in the elections. Although it did not make the 5 per cent threshold, it did get 3.2 per cent of the vote – not a bad result for a marginal splinter party.

*Saskaņa* will again have the largest faction in the Saeima, but probably remain in opposition. Since its foundation in the 1990s, the party has been stigmatized and isolated from any possible coalition because of significant policy differences, such as state language, citizenship and geopolitics, that is, its attitude towards Russia. This time, the only party that did not emphatically exclude the possibility of future cooperation with *Saskaņa* was the populist KPV.LV. The problem, however, is that with their 23 and 16 seats, respectively, these parties do not have anything close to a majority and no other partner would join such a coalition. This means that the long-established tradition of keeping *Saskaņa* out of executive power will continue at least for four more years.

The creation of the next centre-right (that is, ethnic Latvian) coalition will not be an easy task, however. Moreover, this ruling coalition will include extremely diverse ideological positions. For example, AP is a newly founded liberal party, whose programme includes legalization of same-sex partnerships, automatic naturalization of non-citizen children, and similar positions. The NA, on the contrary, is actually a far-right party, which emphatically rejects all this and wants Latvia to move in the direction of Viktor Orbán's 'illiberal democracy'. Similar differences apply also to their attitudes towards the EU: while AP and New UNITY defend deeper European integration and Latvia being at the heart of the EU, NA emphatically opposes any 'federalization' of Europe. JKP, for its part, campaigned on anti-corruption rhetoric directed against the 'oligarchs', first and foremost Aivars Lembergs, the mayor of Ventspils. Now they will have to cooperate in the government with Lembergs' party, ZZS, which may further complicate the work of the ruling coalition.

The situation is further complicated by the fact that the majority (around 60 per cent) of possible coalition MPs have little or no political experience; some of them even lack the basic knowledge of what parliament is and what it does. This applies first and foremost to the KPV.LV faction, to a lesser extent to JKP and AP. This means that the new parliament is going to need a considerable adaptation period, while the newly elected politicians undergo 'training on the job'. There is also a bright side, however: this parliament will have 31 women out of 100 MPs: the number of female MPs has doubled since 2014. The parliament has also become slightly younger: the average age of a newly elected MP is 47.3 years (down from 49.1 in the previous parliament).

Bad news for Latvian democracy is the fall in voter turnout. While in 2014 58.5 per cent of voters went to the polls, this year the figure was only 54.6 per cent. As in most European countries, turnout has been shrinking in Latvia since the early 1990s, when the country regained its independence. During the previous few Saeima elections, it seemed to have stabilized at around 60 per cent, so the present drop is an unpleasant surprise. One can speculate about the reasons. The participation of populist parties in elections obviously does not increase participation. On the contrary, the noisy and aggressive campaign style might have scared some voters off: they simply did not want to be part of such a 'messy' process. Before the elections, a record number of voters (25.5 per cent) reported that they were 'undecided'. Obviously, none of the political parties succeeded in attracting those undecided voters, many of whom simply did not show up for the election.

At the time of writing, the composition of the next government is still undecided. The right to nominate the candidate for prime minister lies with the state president, Raimonds Vējonis, who has declared that the next government must follow the country's traditional geopolitical course and proceed with reforms of the public sector. Multiple coalition set-ups are possible, however. Because *Saskaņa* is not regarded as 'eligible' for participation, the main question is whether the two largest populist parties, KPV.LV and JKP,

should participate in the ruling coalition. JKP is seen as an acceptable partner by most Latvian politicians, and its leader, the lawyer Jānis Bordāns, is a credible candidate for prime minister. It is not going to be easy to form such a coalition, however. First of all, Bordāns and his party has had a very troubled relationship with ZZS, which is seen as deeply corrupt. If the JKP rejects ZZS as a possible coalition partner, however, it would have to accept the aggressively populist KPV.LV instead. This may cause a lot of problems for other possible members of the new government because it is still not clear whether AP or *New UNITY* would participate in a coalition with KPV.LV, whose leading figures have often personally insulted the AP and *New UNITY*. This might lead to JKP and Bordāns being unable to form a government. In this case, several scenarios are possible.

First of all, the state president could invite some other politician to form the government, such as incumbent prime minister Māris Kučinskis from ZZS, who could chair a right-wing government with *Saskaņa*, leaving KPV.LV in opposition. This seems unlikely because ZZS has lost a great deal

of support and JKP would not agree to work in another Kučinskis government. Second, the president could invite a non-partisan candidate to be prime minister, who would be able to consolidate politicians from different parties, even from *Saskaņa*. This happened in 1995, when the populist-dominated sixth Saeima could not agree on a prime minister. At present, however, there is no suitable non-partisan figure to be seen; moreover, an apolitical figure can appear only when all possible political candidates have been exhausted. Third, the country can live with a technocratic government for a while. According to the Constitution, snap elections are possible only as early as 2020, which means that the thirteenth Saeima will have to work at least for a year. These are only future possibilities, however. Right now, it seems that the dominant strategy is still the JKP-led ruling coalition with or without KPV.LV, and definitely without *Saskaņa*. An additional source of urgency is the centenary of Latvian statehood, to be celebrated on 18 November. Most Latvians would like to celebrate the centenary of their statehood with a legitimate government, and most politicians understand that.

## About the author

**Ivars Ijabs** is a Latvian political scientist and commentator, an Associate Professor at the University of Latvia. His research interests include the history of political ideas, nationalism, as well as interethnic relations in Central and Eastern Europe. He is the author of several books on political theory and Latvian politics, as well as of many scholarly articles. He writes a regular column in the Latvian magazine „Rīgas Laiks”, as well as in other publications. He is the Vice-President for Professional development of the Association of the Advancement of Baltic Studies (AABS), as well as a member of several other scholarly organizations. Ijabs has studied philosophy and political science in Latvia, Germany, and Iceland. In 2010, he was Fulbright Visiting Scholar at the State University of New Jersey, US. Ijabs is one of the most well-known political and cultural commentators in Latvia.

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The FES promotes:

- a free society, based on the values of solidarity, which offers all its citizens the same opportunities to participate on political, economic, social and cultural levels, regardless of their origin, sex or religion
- a lively and strong democracy; sustainable economic growth with decent work for all
- a welfare state that provides more education and improved healthcare, but at the same time combats poverty and provides protection against the challenges that life throws at citizens
- a country that is responsible for peace and social progress in Europe and in the world.

## FES in the Baltic States

Shortly after the restoration of independence, in 1992, the Friedrich Ebert Foundation started its activities in the three Baltic States and opened offices in Riga, Tallinn and Vilnius.

The core concern was to support the democratic transition processes, to accompany the Baltic States on their way to the European Union and to promote the dialogue between the Baltic States and Germany, and among the countries of this region.

The current focus of the work of the Friedrich Ebert Foundation in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania is:

- strengthening democracy and active civil society
- supporting the European integration process
- contributing to the development of a common European foreign and security policy
- promoting a fair and sustainable development of economic and social policies in the Baltic States and in the EU

The views expressed in this publication are not necessarily those of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung or of the organization for which the author works.

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