

DEMOCRACY AND HUMAN RIGHTS

# CORRUPTION AS GAME CHANGER:

lessons learned and context  
to the Riga city council snap elections

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The dismissal of Riga city council was caused to a large extent by corruption scandals and triggered snap elections in late August 2020. Because of the capital city's economic weight and population share, the results of these elections are of pivotal importance, coming two years before the next national parliamentary elections.



The passive stance of the social democratic Harmony party (Saskaņa) and the actions of political leaders are likely to have been more important than the party programme in affecting the results of the elections.



The results constitute a landslide victory for challenger political forces. The reasons can be traced not only to public dissatisfaction with corruption, but also to the broader political party landscape.



Riga, with its more than 600,000 inhabitants, is not only Latvia's largest city and capital, but also the country's economic and political powerhouse. Since 2009 the Saskaņa has governed the city continuously – in various constellations – finding its support largely among the East Slavic portion of the voters.

## CORRUPTION AND DEFECTIVE LEADERSHIP

The extraordinary elections called for Riga city council were the outcome of a number of political processes. For several years the media had been reporting suspicious or even criminal deals involving Riga's municipal companies (including payments made by Riga minibuss service providers to the Latvian United Labour Union, the purchase of so-called 'nanotechnological water' by the Riga public transport company Rīgas satiksme, seemingly fictitious employment in the city-owned housing company Rīgas namu pārvaldnieks, bribery in Riga's Central Market and the use of Riga city funds for political purposes). The council leaders tried to distance themselves from these deals and criminal investigations did not make much progress, which in turn undermined public trust in the functioning of Riga's city agencies.

Arguably, the biggest corruption scandal in Riga in the past few years was provoked by the arrest in December 2018 of Leons Bemhens, manager of the city transport company Rīgas satiksme, as well as of several other company employees and the influential businessman Māris Martinsons. They were suspected of bribing officials and money laundering between 2013 and 2016. The difference between these criminal proceedings and previous scandals was not only the international scope of the deals – the bribery concerned the purchase of buses and trolleybuses from the Polish company Solaris Bus & Coach, which cooperated with the investigation in Poland (the Polish anti-corruption service the CBA was also involved) – but also the fact that the investigation included a search of the office and home of Riga city mayor Nils Ušakovs. This indirectly confirmed the information put out by the Corruption Prevention and Combating Bureau (KNAB) and disseminated by the news agency LETA that a group of individuals had facilitated the bribery of responsible officials of the Riga City Council and Rīgas satiksme in relation to three procurement tenders.

These criminal proceedings led to fundamental changes in Riga city council. Riga city deputy mayor Andris Ameriks (of the party 'Honoured to Serve Riga' – Gods Kalpot Rīgai, GKR) resigned from office a few days after KNAB's arrests. In his resignation statement on 17 December 2018, he emphasised that, although he was not involved in the abuses at Rīgas satiksme, he was resigning in order to reduce the damage to his own reputation and that of his party. The day after Ameriks' resignation, Oļegs Burovs (GKR) was elected deputy chair of Riga city council.

Significant changes also took place in the social-democratic Saskaņa. In the second half of January 2019, the party exec-

utive unanimously confirmed Vjačeslavs Dombrovskis as party leader in the European Parliament (EP) elections scheduled for May 2019. This was a week before the search conducted in Nils Ušakovs' home and office, but decisions had already been made at the end of February on cooperation between Saskaņa and GKR in the European Parliamentary elections and the inclusion of Nils Ušakovs and his deputy Andris Ameriks in the list of candidates. Although Ušakovs denied that the criminal investigation had led to the sudden decision to participate in European elections, political commentators linked it to MEPs' immunity from criminal persecution in Latvia.

An additional factor was an order signed by Minister of the Environment and Regional Development Juris Pūce (of the left-liberal party Attīstībai/Par!, A/P) that dismissed Nils Ušakovs from the position of Riga mayor on the grounds that the mayor had been guilty of negligence and legal violations since 2017.<sup>1</sup> This allowed GKR to obtain formal control over the Riga mayoralty. First, Oļegs Burovs became acting chair of Riga city council, then Dainis Turlais was elected the new mayor of Riga. When Turlais lost his position in June, however, Burovs again became acting mayor. In August 2019 Riga city council elected him mayor proper.

Ušakovs' election to the European Parliament and subsequent distancing from Riga city council had a serious impact on the council's ability to function. As the Saskaņa and GKR coalition grew weaker, four Saskaņa members split from their faction and established a new political group, with a number of political demands. As a result, the coalition lost a stable majority in the council, raising the prospect of extraordinary elections. Although for several months the former majority coalition on Riga city council was able to agree on further activities, in autumn 2019 this situation came to an end.

The issue of waste management in Riga had been important since late 2018. Under Nils Ušakovs, Riga city council had decided to outsource waste management to the joint stock company Tīrīga, establishing a monopoly, which enabled the company to raise waste collection tariffs in the city by approximately 40 per cent. Although the Ministry of the Environment and Regional Development did not object to this, the Competition Council presented an obstacle, demanding that the city submit a plan for compliance with competition regulations in the unsorted and split household waste collection and transportation sectors. This dispute between the city and the competition authorities threatened city waste collection. As a result, on 11 September 2019, the Cabinet of Ministers decided to declare an emergency in Riga to solve the waste crisis, which had developed in parallel with the coalition conflicts in the city council. From this juncture the idea of an extraordinary municipal election in Riga was expressed more and more frequently.

<sup>1</sup> Ušakovs interpreted this action as political revenge and appealed the minister's order. As of the preparation of this report, the court ruling was against Ušakovs but had not entered into force due to ongoing appeals.

After a new procurement round for waste management services, the Competition Council was satisfied, but the state of emergency in Riga had to be prolonged. Expressing dissatisfaction with this situation, Minister of the Environment and Regional Development Juris Pūce submitted for government consideration a draft law dismissing the current Riga city council and announcing new elections in light of their inability to perform the organisation of household waste collection, an autonomous function stipulated in the law. The Cabinet of Ministers supported this proposal despite doubts about its legality raised by the State Chancellery. The ministers of the populist party KPV LV did not support this proposal as they did not consider the city council unable to perform its duties. The Legal Office of the Saeima (parliament) expressed similar doubts.

The most stable legal basis for the proposed action was created by the Riga City Council itself, however, which failed to convene council meetings on three consecutive occasions in February 2020. This situation arose after Riga mayor Oļegs Burovs allegedly agreed such tactics with opposition council members. The legal position was no longer in doubt and on 13 February the Saeima decided to announce extraordinary elections for Riga city council. At the same time, this situation deepened the conflict between Saskaņa and GKR that had emerged after Nils Ušakovs left the office.

## ADMINISTRATION OF ELECTIONS

According to the law dismissing Riga city council, new elections had to be organised within two months of its entry into force. The new council would have a five-year term, until June 2025, when the next regular municipal elections are scheduled. This term of office was determined by the law on the election of republic city councils and regional councils, which entered into force in February 2020.

The spread of Covid-19 and the resulting emergency situation in Latvia, however, have significantly hampered the organisation of elections. Initially, the extraordinary elections should have been held at the end of April, but because of the pandemic they were postponed to 6 June and then to 29 August.

The Riga election committee was forced to hold the elections in a complicated situation. It required additional preparations regarding staff training, as well as special requirements for polling stations. Sources close to those organising the elections also cited the hesitancy of the Central Election Committee, which approved the recommendations for preventing Covid-19 infections during Riga's 2020 municipal elections only a couple of weeks or so before they were due to take place.

There was also the case of more than 600 unsealed envelopes found in ballot boxes at three polling stations, which initially gave rise to rumours of wrongdoing on the part of Saskaņa. This was exacerbated by earlier stories that Riga election committee chair Juris Kokins had received generous salary from Rīgas satiksme. Although the largest parties had

no wish to call the election results into question, the representatives of the Jaunā Saskaņa went to court to demand new elections at the polling stations where the unsealed envelopes had been found. The Administrative District Court ordered the Central Election Committee to recount the ballots at the relevant polling stations, including envelopes previously recognised as invalid in the count. This did not affect the distribution of mandates between the lists, however.

## CANDIDATE LISTS

Fifteen lists of candidates, making up 707 candidates in total, were submitted for the extraordinary elections. Almost 71 per cent of them were men. The average age of the candidates was 45.6 years. Almost 59 per cent of candidates indicated that they are Latvians by nationality. However, 28 per cent of candidates refused to indicate their nationality (only 1.5 percentage points more than in the parliamentary elections of 2018). Candidates with a higher education made up more than three-quarters of the total (77.2 per cent), comparable with the proportion of such candidates at the 2018 parliamentary elections.

Four more lists of candidates were submitted for the extraordinary elections than for the 2017 municipal elections and three more than for the 2013 elections. This could be seen as an indication of a weakening Saskaņa and its former cooperation partner GKR, and the emergence of new opportunities for their political competitors. It may also hint at a more general desire for change.

The lists were drawn up without major surprises. Despite early announcements concerning the drafting of a common list encompassing the most influential opposition parties, this idea failed (similar to the experience of 2017). The parties explained that they were unable to reach agreement on their programmes and the candidates to be included in the list. Some consolidation did take place, however.

Attīstībai/Par!, a union of three parties, agreed to cooperate with the Progressive party (Progresīvie), which is a relative newcomer on the political scene, founded only three years ago. It was formed from an NGO that advocated a Nordic welfare state approach in Latvia, based on social democratic values. The differences between the parties' programmes and differences of opinion had no visible impact on their joint participation in the elections.

The National Union (NA) established a joint party with the Latvian Association of Regions (LRA), envisaging that, in case of success, LRA leader Edvards Smiltēns would become leader initially, to be replaced by NA leader Einārs Cilinskis in the second half of the city council's term. It is believed that the LRA will participate in the 2022 Saeima elections and if Smiltēns becomes a member of parliament, a vacancy in a city council would become available.

The New Conservative Party (JKP) underwent a change of leadership. Given the initial date of the extraordinary elec-

tions, JKP started the election campaign under the leadership of well-known Saeima member Juris Jurašs. Later on, however, Linda Ozola took over the leadership. Jurašs considered these changes to be related to the Covid-19 pandemic and the death of JKP leader Juta Striķe.

A conflict between Saskaņa and GKR, with each party putting forward its own list, could have far-reaching consequences. This decision followed from the growing tensions between the two parties after the dismissal of Nils Ušakovs. This was facilitated by both the splitting of the Saskaņa faction in Riga city council and the inability of GKR representatives to consolidate the ruling coalition and form a viable majority in the Riga city council. Oļegs Burovs' support for organising extraordinary elections completed the process and added to a split of East Slavic voters who were targeted not only by Saskaņa and GKR but also by Latvia's Russian Union, the Alternative party, and New Harmony.

The participation of activists from Riga neighbourhoods was a new tendency. At the end of 2019, several such activists created the Riga League initiative, urging the opposition parties to agree on a common election programme and draw up a joint list of candidates, including the activists from neighbouring areas. After the idea of the joint list failed, the Riga League activists joined several Latvian parties, to some extent also affecting their election programmes.

## ELECTION PROGRAMMES

In their election platforms, Saskaņa and GKR sought to capitalise on their strengths and achievements in Riga. In line with its ideological profile, Saskaņa emphasised social support and the idea of 'inter-ethnic peace', marking further support for East Slavic identities. Improvements of the city environment, repair of streets as well as support for education, health care and housing were mentioned. GKR emphasised improvements to the city's streets and bridges, support for educational institutions and improvement of the city's environment. Unlike Saskaņa, however, it mentioned specific activities, locations and deadlines. GKR also emphasised more involvement of the city's inhabitants in improving the quality of life in neighbourhoods, setting aside funds for projects earmarked for these locations.

The list of the Alternative party was led by politicians who split from the Saskaņa faction in Riga city council in 2019. It did not prevent the party from being critical of the council's performance, however. The party's promises bore little difference from the main priorities of Saskaņa and GKR, however: repairing streets and gardens, social support and catering to the needs of East Slavic cultural identity. The 'Alternative' party put more emphasis on dealing with issues important for children and young people, as well as mentioning reducing corruption.

The opposition parties – Attīstībai/Par! and Progresīvie, the centre-right New Unity (Jaunā Vienotība), the National Union and the JKP – offered programmes with some common ele-

ments. They unanimously and actively promised to combat corruption and improve the administration of the public utilities that had actually triggered the extraordinary elections. Other common themes were the repair of streets and bridges, housing (including rental housing), development and reduction of real estate tax (at least for certain groups of inhabitants), and solutions for environmental problems. Rarer and more general statements were made about increasing the importance of neighbourhoods in city development, solutions to social problems and educational issues. Quite unique was the National Union's idea of a Greater Riga and the Development/For/Progressives proposal to create a team for attracting international investments.

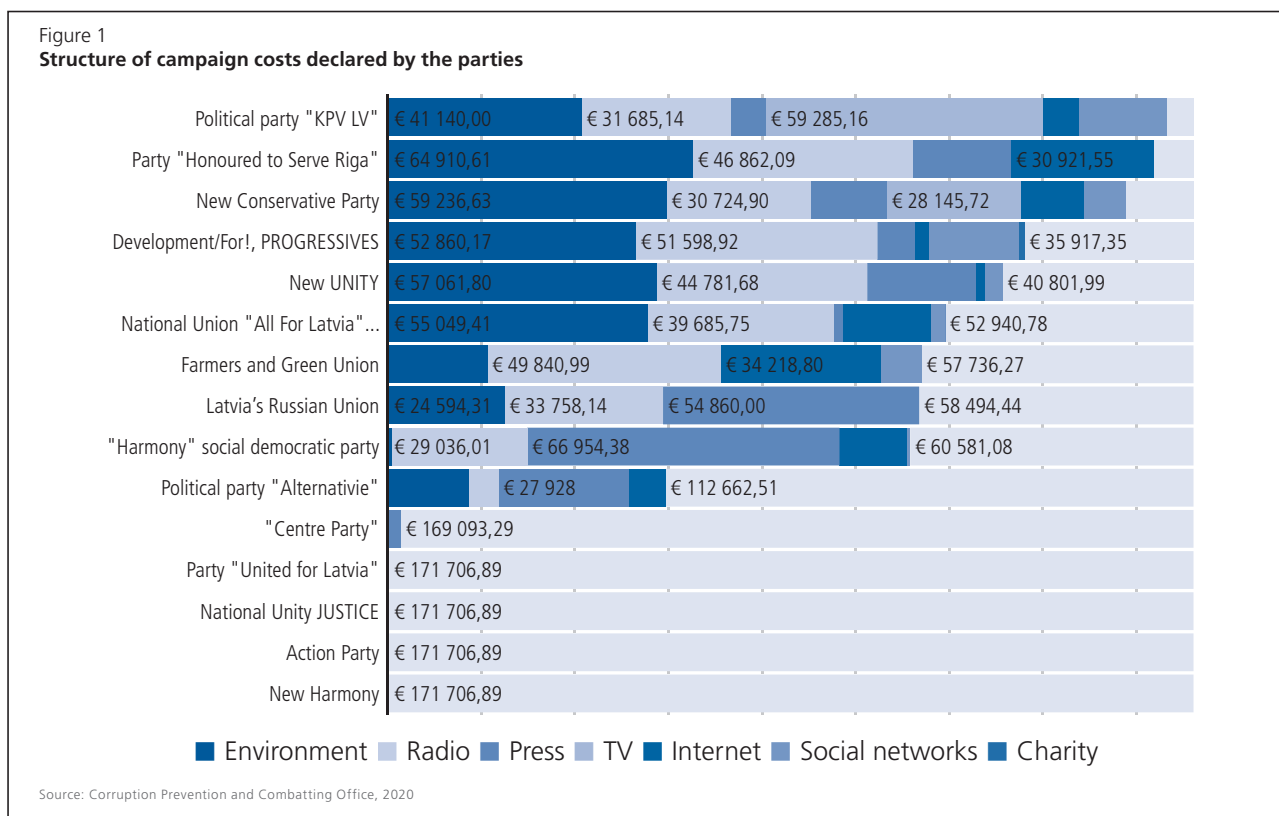
The Latvia's Russian Union, which was not represented in Riga city council, sharply criticised the activities of Saskaņa and GKR, but focused on addressing East Slavic cultural identity needs: the use of Russian in communication with municipal institutions, celebration of holidays related to minority traditions in Riga, activities of educational establishments, and maximum support for the recognition of national minorities. These promises were complemented by the introduction of free public transport, as well as the improvement of public utilities administration and the reduction of costs.

## ELECTION CAMPAIGN

The election campaign was unexpectedly long. Even before the official campaign accounting period began, Attīstībai/Par! launched a high-profile publicity campaign, boosting name recognition and improving image of its candidate for the position of Riga mayor, Mārtiņš Staķis. Later, the JKP launched similar activities, promoting its mayoral candidate Juris Jurašs. The parties had to temporarily suspend their campaigns, however, due to the rescheduling of the elections to 29 August.

The parties' positions were strongly affected by the corruption scandals in Riga city council. The long-standing majority parties Saskaņa and GKR emphasised their contributions to the development of Riga, trying to distance themselves from the many criminal proceedings initiated by law enforcement agencies in relation to the operation of municipal corporations. Conversely, other parties, especially those that had been in the city council opposition, harshly criticised the administration of Riga and promised to combat corruption, which was directly or indirectly related to the period during which Nils Ušakovs was the mayor. It is worth noting that the less popular East Slavic parties also emphasised corruption problems. On the other hand, the parties' positive offer was relatively uniform and the platforms of the most popular parties differed rather in nuance (see the section 'Election programmes') and leaders.

Leading candidate of Attīstībai/Par! and the Progressives was Saeima deputy Mārtiņš Staķis, whose diverse positioning combined with ambitious publicity clearly indicated his determination to fight hard to become mayor. Vilnis Ķirsis from Jaunā Vienotība had already proven himself in the 2017



elections, helping the party to overcome the 5 per cent electoral threshold, and gaining political experience by remaining active in the Riga city council opposition. During the campaign, he positioned himself as a competent leader. The inclusion of former Vienotība politician Edvards Smiltēns in the joint list of the National Union and the Latvian Association of Regions may have confused the most undecided nationalists, but his involvement in campaign debates complemented the experience of the joint list leader Einārs Cilinskis in local government issues. A vivid campaign was led by the Green and Farmers Union (ZZS) leader Viktors Valainis, who was the executive director of the Large Cities Association at the same time.

Not all parties signalled serious intentions through their choice of leaders in these elections, however. Returning to active campaigning in the summer, JKP changed its mayoral candidate as a result of internal party processes. This was an indirect indication that JKP had lost its mayoral ambitions. This did not prevent Linda Ozola from using aggressive rhetoric against their closest political rivals (A/P, JV, NA) at the end of the campaign, which also showed the party's worries about its ability to overcome the 5 per cent barrier.

A lack of serious intentions was even more apparent in Saskaņa, which chose Konstantīns Čekušins, a little-known engineer, as its leading candidate. However, he had experience from the movement for the protection of Russian schools, and Saskaņa's choice rather indicated a wish to compete with the Latvia's Russian Union for the more radical part of the East Slavic population by not allowing representatives of the Union on the Riga city council. Saskaņa's current lack of ambition is also indicated by the party's election spending.

Information provided by the political parties shows that five of the 15 lists have to date spent almost nothing on their campaigns, and their public visibility is very low. Three parties – KPV LV, GKR and JKP – have spent close to the allowed limit and six other lists have spent between 110,000 and 135,000 euros. It is worth noting that Saskaņa, whose spending is usually the highest, has spent less in this election than any other party with a chance of having representatives elected to Riga city council. Furthermore, the party has used a different strategy than its competitors, emphasising press and radio advertisements, while almost completely renouncing advertising hoardings.

## ELECTION RESULTS

Seven lists exceeded the 5 per cent required to be elected. An impressive victory was scored by Development/For! and the Progressives headed by Mārtiņš Staķis. After voter preferences were counted, the Progressives emerged as major winners as their candidates won 11 out of 18 mandates, which immediately gave rise to speculation about an instability of the victors faction in the Riga city council. Jaunā Vienotība, an opposition party before these elections, significantly improved its position. The National Alliance and Party of Regions won a number of seats comparable to the National Alliance's results in 2017. The JKP, by contrast, suffered considerable losses. It is worth noting that the former opposition party included several Riga League activists from the neighbourhoods, who achieved good results.

In the context of involvement in scandals and the fact that the previous council had been dismissed by the minister, losses could be expected for Saskaņa. As it turned out, the party

Table 1  
Extraordinary elections to Riga city council, 29 August 2020

List	Valid votes	Percentage	Seats
Development/For!, Progressives (Attīstībai/Par!, 'Progresīvie')	44759	26.14%	18
Harmony (Saskaņa)	28950	16.91%	12
New Unity (Jaunā Vienotība)	26085	15.24%	10
National Alliance 'All for Latvia', 'Fatherland and Freedom' – Latvian National Independence Movement, Latvian Union of Regions (Visu Latvijai, Tēvzemei un Brīvībai – LNNK, Latvijas Reģionu Apvienība)	16500	9.64%	7
Party 'Honoured to Serve Riga' (Gods kalpot Rīgai)	13203	7.71%	5
Latvia's Russian Union (Latvijas Krievu savienība)	11170	6.52%	4
New Conservative Party (Jaunā konservatīvā partija)	10939	6.39%	4
'Alternative'	5185	3.03%	0
KPV LV	1927	1.13%	0
New Harmony (Jaunā Saskaņa)	2904	1.70%	0
Union of Greens and Farmers (Zaļo un Zemnieku Savienība)	6956	4.06%	0
Party 'United for Latvia' (Vienoti Latvijai)	585	0.34%	0
National Unity Justice (Nacionālā Savienība Taisnīgums)	393	0.23%	0
Action Party (Rīcības partija)	301	0.18%	0
Centre Party (Centra Partija)	266	0.16%	0

Source: Central Elections Committee

did only slightly better than in the elections of 2005, that had been the worst result for the party in the 21st century. The party also failed to prevent the election of the competing Latvia's Russian Union to the Riga city council. Other members of the majority coalition performed with different degrees of success. GKR, led by Oļegs Burovs, gained five mandates, while the 'Alternative' party, led by the city council members who had split from Saskaņa, did not clear the 5 per cent threshold.

Several conclusions can be drawn from the election results:

- The elections were won by the opposition parties, ending more than 10 years of rule by Saskaņa and its partners in Riga.
- Voters of the winners continued to look for new faces on the lists of candidates, with neighbourhood activists and new candidates performing successfully.
- The supporters of left liberal ideas gained significant support in the capital city, which potentially weakens the unity of the so-called Latvian parties in Riga.
- The pre-election campaign and the election results were significantly affected by the quality of administration and corruption scandals in the city council led by Nils Ušakovs. Many supporters of Saskaņa, possibly disappointed in the city council, did not participate in the vote and considerably affected the distribution of mandates.
- The passive tactics chosen by Saskaņa, seemingly aimed at weakening its closest political rivals, were a total failure. The Latvia's Russian Union and GKR won seats in the city council. Only the 'Alternative' members who had split from Saskaņa suffered a defeat.
- The JKP performed poorly in these elections following the corruption scandals. JKP's political platform was

based on justice and combatting corruption. This result may indicate that JKP supporters are mobilised by the political leaders rather than by the party programme.

- The results of the list led by Mārtiņš Staķis also provide indirect evidence of the limited importance of corruption issues for the voters. Although the media have reported extensively about possible links between the influential Edgars Jaunups (A/P) and a number of suspicious cases, the united list won a convincing victory, which could be interpreted as a victory for the leader's public image over ideas and principles.

## COALITION-BUILDING

The election results provided for a relatively simple coalition model, as the former opposition agreed on setting up an impressive majority (39 out of 60 seats). Mathematically, a coalition could have been built by only three partners, without inviting JKP or NA. This arrangement would have ignored the national level of politics, however, at which not inviting, for example, JKP into the coalition could have resulted in serious instability and even the fall of the government led by Krišjānis Kariņš.

Although disputing the election results in response to the unsealed envelopes delayed the official announcement of the results, it did not seriously affect the mutual consultations between the parties. The outcome was based on the formula 1+3: Mārtiņš Staķis as candidate for the mayor's office, and three other coalition partners as candidates for deputy mayors. This was received with some mistrust by the public and gave rise to political criticism. On 2 October 2020, however, Mārtiņš Staķis was elected mayor of Riga, also supported by part of the opposition. The three deputy mayors

did not enjoy such strong support, but were approved nevertheless. Vilnis Ķirsis (JV) will be responsible for investment attraction, Edvards Smiltēns (NA/LRA) for cooperation with the local governments surrounding Riga, and Linda Ozola (JKP) will be in charge of justice. The possibility raised after the elections that a representative of the opposition could lead one of the city council committees did not materialise.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

The governance model of the Riga city council built by Saskaņa over a long period of time collapsed after the management of Rīgas satiksme was suspected of corruption and arrested. KNAB also indicated, however, that the suspected crimes also extend into the political hinterland. These events caused a chain reaction, as Nils Ušakovs and Andris Ameriks urgently took part in the European Parliament elections and won mandates as MEPs.

The machine politics of the city that overall had functioned smoothly lost experienced managers. In their absence, internal conflicts developed in the Saskaņa faction that hindered political decision-making in the city. As problems continued and Riga city council lost the ability to act due to internal problems, the national parliament announced extraordinary city council elections, although they were postponed because of the pandemic.

Observing that Saskaņa and GKR were weakened, their political competitors in the elections proliferated. Although the parties severely criticised the ‘plague of corruption’ in Riga city council, such criticisms may have played less of a role in affecting voters than was expressed publicly. Scandals and Saskaņa’s tactical considerations may have contributed to a historically-low level of voter activity. In this situation, the city council became more fragmented, but establishment of the coalition was smooth, and the political structure of the national and city levels almost corresponded, creating a situation that has not existed for the past 15 years. We shall see how much of a difference this new model will make for the development of the capital.

Saskaņa is to be considered the main loser in these elections. Not only did it lose the mayoralty and was confined to opposition, but as a result of these events it must also now deal with considerable obstacles from the political competition. In fact, Saskaņa lost one of its most publicly-recognised and positively valued leaders, Nils Ušakovs. Although this loss has strengthened the wing of Saskaņa led by Jānis Urbanovičs, several newly-attracted and relatively moderate politicians (Vjačeslavs Dombrovskis, Ļubova Švecova, Evija Papule) have left the party. Therefore, Saskaņa must solve the problem of bringing on new public leaders and its internal unity, as well as define its policy priorities before the parliamentary elections of 2022. This challenge has been increased by the election to Riga city council of Saskaņa’s closest competitors, the Latvia’s Russian Union, who are also represented in the European Parliament. The parties represented in parliament must

also address the risk of Saskaņa’s radicalisation in a situation in which the party has lost access to substantial economic and political resources.

Although the new mayor of Riga is a representative of Attīstībai/Par!, the Progressives must be considered the main winner. The members of this party won nine of the 18 list mandates gained by A/P+P. The activists from the surrounding regions participating in this list and standing alongside Progressives won a further two mandates. On one hand, this success is borne of the constant attempts of a part of Latvia’s voters to find new, more effective politicians. But it may also signal more fundamental changes in the development of political ideas in Latvia as voters born after Latvia regained its independence turn to left-libertarian ideas. The parliamentary elections in 2022 will be particularly important, providing another opportunity to test these ideas after the Progressives would have spent two years in the ruling coalition at the Riga city council .

Closer to these elections, the Progressives could reasonably become concerned about its chances of winning parliamentary seats, and attempt to define their ideological profile more clearly in the spotlight of local government. This trend could become a source of tension between the Progressives and Attīstībai/Par!, facilitate closer contacts between the Progressives and the Kustība Par! Party, while also increasing the tension in the city council coalition.



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- 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.

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Saskaņa is in a difficult strategic situation. One of the party's powerhouses – Riga City Council faction – has been dramatically weakened and the party's Saeima faction now plays a dominant role. Furthermore, rivalry for East Slavic votes is reinvigorated while the party faces leadership issues.



The big winners of the elections provoked by a series of corruption scandals are not the incumbent parties but the explicitly cross-ethnic, social democratic Progresīvie. Although the party has yet to prove that its success was not a one-shot, its success may be related to a generational change among voters and their political preferences.



To proclaim an end to ethnic voting, however, may be premature to issue as parties predominantly rooted in the East Slavic segment are excluded from the coalition in Riga and were not offered power sharing arrangements.

Further information on the topic can be found here:  
<https://www.fes-baltic.org>