



## Attempts to form a new government in Latvia

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On 20 May, Andris Kulbergs of the opposition United List (AS) alliance opened four-party talks aimed at forming a new Latvian government. The previous coalition had collapsed, and Prime Minister Evika Siliņa resigned on 14 May. The formation of a new cabinet and its stability will depend on the parties' ability to cooperate in the run-up to the parliamentary elections, which must be held by the beginning of October this year at the latest under the constitution.

### Why did Siliņa's government fall?

The collapse of the three-party coalition in Latvia's 100-member unicameral parliament, and the subsequent resignation of the Siliņa government, led by the centre-right New Unity (JV – 25 seats), was triggered by the dismissal of Defence Minister Andris Sprūds. The politician, from the centre-left Progressives (PRO – 9 seats), was dismissed following an incident in which Ukrainian drones crashed near Rēzekne. The head of government, representatives of her party and the third coalition partner, the centrist Union of Greens and Farmers (ZZS – 16 seats), blamed the minister for a lack of adequate response and for neglecting the development of air defence. Friction within the coalition intensified following PRO's accusation that Siliņa had unilaterally dismissed the minister and appointed her informal security adviser, Colonel Raivis Melnis, as his successor. After PRO announced it would not support the government, the Prime Minister resigned, and President Edgars Rinkēvičs held talks with the parties, after which he nominated Kulbergs, from the opposition centre-right AS (13 seats), as the new candidate for Prime Minister.

### What are the possibilities and prospects for forming a new government?

The distribution of seats – including a dozen or so held by independent MPs – and the reluctance of other parties to cooperate with the populist 'Latvia First' (LPV – 8 seats) means that it is impossible to form a majority coalition without the participation of JV or PRO. Furthermore, due to

the ideologically motivated resistance by the right-wing National Alliance (NA) to cooperation with PRO, the party of the former defence minister, it is not possible to form a government including both these groups. Meanwhile, Kulbergs began coalition talks with the ZZS and NA. This left only JV as a viable partner, which offered to join in exchange for an equal division of 15 ministerial posts and the position of Speaker of the Saeima. If the negotiations succeed and a new four-party government is formed, it will have the support of at least 66 MPs. The prospect of a general election and the campaign leading up to it may complicate the formation of a cabinet and the stabilisation of cooperation with coalition partners, but no party is in favour of calling an early election.

### What impact might the government crisis have on the parliamentary elections?

The collapse of Siliņa's government could lead to a further decline in support for her JV party, which had already dropped to 10% in late March and early April this year, compared with over 19% in the 2022 elections it won. However, this situation is beneficial for the isolated LPV, which has built its support on criticism of the government and its leader, and now leads in the polls with up to 15% support. The extra-parliamentary opposition, including the right-wing Sovereign Power (up to 10% support), which is linked to the Russian minority, is also counting on an increase in its support. Current polling reveals a highly fragmented landscape, with seven parties—including all those participating in coalition talks—securing between the

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5% threshold and 15% of the vote. This may herald both a fiercely contested election campaign and a difficult coalition if a government is formed during this parliamentary term.

## **How might Latvia's foreign policy change?**

A Kulbergs-led government would not alter Latvia's foreign policy, particularly its eastern strategy. As a prospective coalition partner, the NA advocates an even tougher stance towards both Russia and Latvia's Russian minority. According to NA, national defence requires protecting the

Latvian language and culture from Russian influence. At the same time, whilst the party does not question EU membership, it advocates restricting it to a common trade area, potentially making it difficult for the government to support deeper European integration. All parties involved in the coalition talks favour maintaining strong transatlantic ties and support both US involvement in European security and NATO's presence on the eastern flank, including the deployment of allied—including Polish—forces on Latvian territory. They also call for deeper cooperation with regional partners like Poland, particularly on defence matters.