

## Talks on the governing coalition in Lithuania

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In the parliamentary elections which concluded on 23 October, victory went to the centrist Union of Peasants and Greens (LVŽS), which won 54 seats. This is the best result for an electoral political party in Lithuania since 1996. Bolstered by two mandates from independent candidates, political group of LVŽS will have 56 out of the 141 seats in parliament. The conservative Homeland Union-Christian Democrats finished second and will have 31 seats. The ruling Social Democrats suffered a heavy defeat, obtaining just 17 seats. 14 seats went to the Liberal Movement, while the Electoral Action of Poles in Lithuania–Union of Christian Families will keep its existing number of 8 seats. The voters withdrew their support from the Order and Justice party (8 seats), and the Labour Party did not pass the electoral threshold (they won only 2 seats in single-mandate districts).

The leader of the LVŽS, Ramūnas Karbauskis, is holding talks on forming a coalition with both the conservatives and the Social Democrats. During these talks it will be decided which LVŽS politician will become Prime Minister, as Karbauskis has ruled himself out from this position. This opens up a possible opportunity for the LVŽS's popular electoral leader, the former interior minister Saulius Skvernelis, and the former mayor of Ignalina Bronis Ropė.

### Commentary

- The LVŽS's coming to power represents a huge change on the Lithuanian political scene. Since the restoration of Lithuania's independence, the ruling coalitions have been led alternately by the Social Democrats and the conservatives. Currently, both parties have a chance to be in the coalition, but only in the role of junior partner. The Lithuanian people voted for the replacement of the ruling elite, although the winning party did not provide a clear programme, and its new deputies do not have political experience; their popularity is based purely on their criticism of previous governments.
- Both coalitions being considered by the LVŽS are possible. President Dalia Grybauskaitė favours a coalition of the LVŽS with the conservatives, who have made their participation conditional on the Liberals also being included. However, a stronger right wing in the government, with a platform emphasising the need to break down the prevailing monopolies on the Lithuanian market, would undermine Karbauskis's business interests. He is the owner of Agrokoncernas, the most important company on the agricultural machinery and fertiliser market. A more convenient partner for LVŽS would be the Social Democrats, who have been weakened as a result of losing power. But if the LVŽS begins

cooperation with the left, Karbauskis will come under pressure from President Grybauskaitė, who is unenthusiastic about such a coalition. In an attempt to win the favour of the influential President, during the first post-electoral talks the leader of the LVŽS proposed that she should put forward a candidate for the post of defence minister, though formally the President has no such competence.

- Karbauskis has not said he will include the Electoral Action of Poles in Lithuania–Union of Christian Families party as a full partner in a possible coalition with the Social Democrats, but due to the similarity of their policies, including a pro-family policy, he is counting on the Poles' support during votes in parliament. An attempt to strengthen the parliamentary majority by formally including the Polish party into any coalition with the Social Democrats could complicate the LVŽS's relationship with Grybauskaite, who is in a personal dispute with the leaders of the Polish party, and has accused them of supporting the Kremlin's policies.