**Luxembourg’s Elections: Return of the Christian Democrats or Renewal of the “Gambia Coalition”?**

After the municipal elections on 11 June, Luxembourgers will be called upon to elect the 60 members of the Chamber of Deputies on 8 October.

The Christian Social People´s Party (PCS/CSV), the leading opposition party, lost in the June municipal elections but remained the strongest party in the 56 largest cities of the Grand Duchy. Of the three governing parties in the so-called “Gambia coalition”, the Democratic Party (PD/DP) of Prime Minister Xavier Bettel won some additional mandates, the Luxembourg Socialist Workers´Party (POSL/LSAP) held their ground, while the third coalition partner, the Greens, suffered significant losses.

However, past experience shows that the outcome of the local elections hardly ever predicts that of the parliamentary elections.

**State of Play: CSV leading in the polls**

Six hundred forty-three candidates from 12 political parties are running in the parliamentary elections. 57 of the 60 current MPs are standing for re-election. The last parliamentary elections on 14 October 2018 saw a drop in support for the traditional parties. The Christian Social Party, the Socialist Workers' Party and the Democratic Party all lost seats. The "small" parties, and to a lesser extent populist or radical parties, made gains. The Greens/Dei Greng (LV-DG) were the clear winners, which allowed the previous coalition government of the Democratic Party, the Socialist Workers' Party and the Greens, led by Xavier Bettel, to stay in office.

According to an [opinion poll](https://today.rtl.lu/news/luxembourg/a/2110420.html) conducted last August by the Ilres Institute on behalf of the multimedia group RTL and the daily Luxemburger Wort, the Christian Social Party (CSV) would come first in the elections on 8 October with 28.3% of the vote. The Socialist Workers Party would come second with 19.8%, followed by the Democratic Party with 17.4%. The Greens are fourth with 10.7%, and the Pirate Party (PPL) stands at 9.9%, ahead of the reformist Democratic Alternative Party (6.9%) and The Left/Dei Lenk (LG/DL) with 5%.

The outgoing Prime Minister Xavier Bettel remains the most popular politician among his compatriots, with 34% approval. Finally, 39% of respondents said they would prefer a 2-party coalition, while 29% would like to see a 3-party government. As in other countries, political fragmentation and an increase in the number of parties can be observed in Luxembourg.

**How the elections work: compulsory voting for listed candidates**

Luxembourg is a constitutional monarchy headed by Grand Duke Henri. The parliament is a unicameral system: the Chamber of Deputies consists of 60 deputies elected for five-year terms on the basis of proportional representation. Individual candidates are admitted, each of whom is considered a list.

For the general election, the Grand Duchy is divided into four constituencies: The South (cantons of Esch-sur-Azette and Capellen) provides 23 MPs, the Centre (cantons of Luxembourg and Mersch) 21, the North (cantons of Diekirch, Redange, Wiltz, Clervaux and Vianden) 9 and the East (cantons of Grevenmacher, Remich and Echternach) 7.

In Luxembourg, each voter has as many votes as there are MPs to be elected in their constituency. Voters can vote in order of preference, i.e. they can give a vote to any candidate on the same list. They can also vote for candidates on different lists or cast a "double vote", i.e. vote a maximum of twice for one of the candidates on the same list. Voters are free to combine the latter two voting methods, e.g. by casting a double vote for several candidates from different lists. The seats are distributed according to the Hagenbach-Bischoff method. Voting is compulsory in the Grand Duchy. Luxembourg citizens living abroad or outside the commune in which they are called to vote or who are over 75 years of age are exempt from this obligation. Failure to comply is punishable by a fine of between €100 and €250, rising to €500 or €1,000 if repeated within 5 years of the election. Voters can, however, have themselves removed from the electoral roll. However, in practice, "electoral dodgers" are very rarely punished.

**Housing, the economy and working conditions are at the centre of the campaign**

The election campaign officially began on 4 September. The Democratic Party has been campaigning on its Prime Minister Bettel and the success of his government. In its election programme, it focuses on housing, energy transition and the economy. It is sticking to its tax reform project, an unfulfilled promise from the legislative period that is coming to an end. It opposes the reduction of the working week to 36 hours, an increase in corporate taxes, and to exempt civil servants' overtime from being taxed. It is open to all proposals for cooperation with other parties but rejects an alliance with the extreme parties, i.e. the reformist Democratic Alternative and the Left/Dei Lenk party.

Deputy Prime Minister Paulette Lenert, for many years Luxembourg's most popular politician (but now falling behind Xavier Bettel and the Christian Social Party's top candidate Luc Frieden), was elected leader and top candidate of the Socialist Party. The Socialists' programme focuses on housing, health care and taxes. It seeks to fight property speculation, which has driven purchase and rental prices to astronomical heights and advocates that incomes falling below annual earnings at the minimum wage should not be taxed. It wants to introduce two additional tax brackets for the highest incomes, i.e. for incomes above €300,000 and €500,000 per year, respectively. It favours a reduction of the working week from 40 to 38 hours and the introduction of a sixth week of annual leave.

The CSV has surprisingly chosen Luc Frieden, former Minister of Finance and Minister of Justice (1998-2009) and "crown prince" of former Prime Minister Jean-Claude Juncker as its top candidate. He retired from politics in 2013 after the CSV´s electoral defeat at the time and went into finance. He is currently President of the Luxembourg Chamber of Commerce and of Eurochambre.

Frieden wants to lead the CSV back to the top of government. The CSV wants to achieve this with a ten-point election programme to reform health policy, housing construction (among other things, by reducing VAT from 17% to 3% for investors in the construction sector) and internal security (among other things, by hiring 700 additional police officers within 5 years). Regarding the economy, the programme aims to increase purchasing power and implement a fairer tax system. Young entrants to the labour market are to pay less tax for three years. The CSV accuses the tripartite coalition of a mutual blockade attitude to the detriment of the economic development of the Grand Duchy.

The Greens are running with Minister of Justice and Culture Sam Tanson, as their top candidate. The party, whose results in the local elections on 11 June were disappointing, is touting its record in government. It points out that investments in the ecological turnaround reached 174 million euros in 2022 (compared to just 40 million euros in 2017). In addition to an increase in social lines, the Greens highlight in their election programme the promotion of energy modernisation of buildings and further investment in rail infrastructure. It highlights that the production of renewable energy in Luxembourg increased from 3.5% to 12% in the last legislative period.

**Two smaller parties aiming at five seats**

The list of the right-wing conservative Democratic Alternative Reformist Party (ADR) is headed by Fred Keup. The party's motto is "Love Luxembourg", and it hopes to win at least 5 seats on 8 October, which are necessary to form a parliamentary group. Its election programme focuses on economic growth, housing, security and family support. The party challenges the country's current high-growth economic model and wants to replace it with a "moderate growth" model. The ADR wants to hold a referendum on this and on immigration.

The Pirate Party, whose campaign slogan is "Fair solutions for today and tomorrow", is also aiming at 5 seats and the formation of a parliamentary group with its top candidate, Sven Clement. It advocates the abolition of tax brackets and calls for the payment of a monthly climate bonus that would reward environmentally friendly behaviour.

The Left/Dei Lenk (LG/DL) is campaigning for a rent cap, a €300 per month increase in the minimum wage, a 32-hour working week by 2030 with no loss of pay, and the reintroduction of a wealth tax. It also traditionally calls for Luxembourg to leave NATO.

**Open race but no landslides at the edges**

The outcome of the election is completely open and very likely to be close. In the government camp, major losses are expected for the Greens. However, if these are compensated by gains by the Democratic Party of the popular Prime Minister Bettel and/or the Socialists, the current “Gambia coalition” could continue. Should it fail to do so, the Christian Social Party is likely to form the next government with Luc Frieden as prime minister. The most likely coalition partner would be the Socialist Party. After all, the two parties have already governed together for 43 years since the end of the Second World War. If there is neither enough for a third Gambia coalition nor for a two-party coalition, the Pirates, who are anchored in the centre-left of the party spectrum and are expected to do well next Sunday, could become the kingmaker in the formation of the future government. The good news for Europe: Luxembourg is likely to remain a country where the political centre holds after 9 October. Dramatic gains and an increased influence on government by right-wing populist parties are not to be expected.

Author bio

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