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Luxemburg

# Christian Democrats as final hope?

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### **The elections to the Chamber of Deputies, which had been fixed for the same day as the European elections, largely dominated the electoral campaign in Luxemburg.**

The elections saw a sweeping victory for the Christian Democratic Party (CSV) of the outgoing prime minister Jean-Claude Juncker, some gains for the Greens, a defeat for the Liberal coalition partner, losses for the right populist party the ADR, stagnation for the Socialists and a debacle for “La Gauche” [1] which lost half its voters and its one seat in the Chamber of Deputies. The European deputies will be three Christian Democrats, one Socialist, one Liberal and one Green. As voting is obligatory for residents of Luxemburg nationality and non-Luxemburgers who are registered on the electoral lists for the European Parliament, participation was over 90%.

The predominance of the bourgeois parties is explained by the fact that universal suffrage has for a long time been problematic in Luxemburg. Less than a third of wage earners have the right to vote! The wage earning class in Luxemburg is made up of one third native Luxemburgers, one third resident non-Luxemburger workers without the right to vote and one third French, Belgian and German border dwellers who do not vote in Luxemburg.

Why was the Luxemburg government one of the few in Europe to escape punishment? In fact, the results for the two partners in the right wing government were diametrically opposite. Luxemburgers expressed in their voting a fear of neoliberal counter-reforms and social regression. That was shown by the punishment meted out to the Liberal wing of the government (which lost 5 seats in a parliament which has a total of 60 members) and the oppositional right populist party which supported an ultra-neoliberal economic programme, while the main party in government profited from a high-profile media campaign personalized around the emblematic figure of prime minister, Jean-Claude Juncker, who likes to present himself as a socialist inside a bourgeois party. “De séchere Wé” (“the safe road”) was the theme that dominated the campaign. Juncker has for years enjoyed the barely concealed support of the leadership of the biggest trade union. The union leadership is very attached to tripartite negotiations involving government, unions and employers to avoid social conflict. The social democratic opposition has not presented a credible alternative in terms of social policy and was adversely affected by the social-liberal policies of the Schröder government in Germany.

The distribution of seats in the Chamber of Deputies is, then, as follows: Christian Democrats 24 (+5), Socialists 14 (+1), Liberals 10 (-5), Greens 7 (+2), Populists 5 (-2), Déi Lénk-la Gauche 0 (-1).

## **Debacle for the anti-capitalists**

The electoral debacle of “déi Lénk - la Gauche” is all the more painful in that the pressure of the useful vote for the Socialists was actually less keen than had been thought. “La Gauche” was created five years ago as a formation to the left of the Socialists and Greens and included - on the basis of individual recruitment and an anti-capitalist programme - members of the Luxemburg Communist Party (PCL), dissidents and expelled members from the PCL, numerous independent leftists and supporters or allies of the Fourth International. It was not then a cartel. It is an experience unique of its kind with real successes including at the electoral level. A year ago, the members of the PCL left la Gauche to revert to a sectarian neo-Stalinist identity. “La Gauche” had decided to ignore this, which was a fatal error. Left voters were completely disoriented by the split of the neo-Stalinists and the silence of “la Gauche” and reacted by voting for the Socialists and Greens. La Gauche got 1.90% of the vote against 0.92% for the PCL. Even in its bastions, like Esch-sur-Alzette, the country's second biggest town, “déi Lénk” hardly got more than 4%, while in the capital it scored 2.48%. In these two towns “la Gauche” is represented on the local councils.

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It now needs to engage in a difficult self-critical balance sheet. It will have the chance to develop a profile during the referendum campaign on the European constitution. Only "la Gauche" and the PCL are calling for a "No" vote during the referendum, whose date has not yet been set.

During the negotiations for the formation of the new government, Juncker has posed the theoretical possibility of three coalitions (with the Liberals, Greens or the Socialist Party) to fix the bar as high as possible for the social democrats. A future black-red coalition (Christian Democrats and socialists) is a possibility. The stakes are the same as in other European countries (privatization of railways, counter-reforms in social security and so on) with the difference that there is no financial crisis for a state that continues to profit from the money markets protected by the tax system and banking secrecy.

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[1] "Déi Lénk-la Gauche" is the official name of this formation.