

NORWAY

NORBERT BECKMANN-DIERKES

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CLARA SPECHT

September 2013

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Government Change in Norway

HØYRE CLEAR WINNER OF THE PARLIAMENTARY ELECTION

On the 9th of September 2013, the citizens of Norway elected a new Parliament. Despite his popularity in the population and being the chairman of the strongest party, the election has been a resounding defeat for the Prime Minister Jens Stoltenberg. After eight years of governing in a coalition consisting of the Labour Party, Socialist Left Party and the Centre Party, Norwegian electorate voted for a change of government.

Till the last minute of the 9th of September, members of the Høyre and Arbeiderpartiet fought for votes. At 9pm the polling booths closed and about 3,6 millions eligible voters had the opportunity to vote 169 members of the Storting. From 169 to allocate mandates 150 will be directly voted by the nineteen constituencies. The remaining nineteen mandates are country-wide allocated as overhang seats. Thirteen parties were registered for election.

Clear settings

For months the conservative Høyre led in the polls clearly over the ruling social democratic party, which put up the ruling and not unpopular prime minister Jens Stoltenberg.

In the last weeks of campaigning the both opponents (Høyre and Socialdemocrats) had an impressive race. It still seemed to be possible of a continuation of the left-wing coalition. Nevertheless on election eve when the first election forecast appeared on the screens, it was clear that there would be a change of government in Norway. The clear winner of the election was Erna Solberg, the chairwoman of Høyre and of good scope to

be the following Prime Minister. The election forecast and first projections showed that the conservative parties (Høyre, Christdemocrats, Liberals and right-winged conservative Fremdskeppspartiet) won with a distinct advance over the ruling coalition of social democrats, socialist left-wing party and rurally Centre-Party.

Høyre gain in votes of 9,6 percentage point in comparison to the last parliamentary election in 2009 and got in total 26,8 percent of the votes. Høyre is the second strongest party in the parliament with 48 seats. Together with the right-winged conservative Fremdskeppspartiet, which got 16,3 percentage of the votes, they unite 77 of 169 mandates. A success was also the election result of the Christian democrats.

At 9.30pm the projection showed that six percent voted for the Christian democrats. The result could not remain and decreased to 5,6 percent, which correspond to ten seats in the Storting. It is a very similar result compared to the last election. The liberal Party (Venstre) reached 5,2% and 9 mandates. The conservative parties have now 96 seats in the parliament. The biggest deprivation of the election had the social democratic Arbeiderpartiet. The election result was 30,9% which meant a 4,5% loss compared to the last election. With 55 Mandates the Arbeiderpartiet is still the strongest party in parliament. However, together with their coalition partners rural Centre-Party (Senterparti, 5,5% / 10 mandates) and the social left-wing Party (Sosialistisk venstreparti, 4,1% / 7 mandates) they just possess 72 mandates. The new formed Green Party could not hurdle the 4 percent but they won one direct mandate in Oslo.

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Tension till the End

Despite the economic growth of 2,6% of GDP per year and an unemployment rate of 3,5% many Norwegians are not satisfied with the accomplishment of their government during the last eight years. Necessary reforms in the health care policy have not been tackled, also the development of a suitable transport infrastructure for Norway was not realised. Failures in education policy are another important reason for the election defeat of the ruling coalition.

Also with a cabinet overhaul and an election campaign with questions regarding health care policy they could not convince the electorate.

Preview on the coalition talks

Already in the late Monday evening, Jens Stoltenberg accepted his loss and congratulated Erna Solberg. At the same time, Erna Solberg pronounced to start coalition talks firstly with the Fremdskriftspartiet. Høyre and Fremdskriftspartiet unite 77 seats in the Storting, hence at least one partner more is needed for a majority. Prospects might be the Christian democrats around their young leader Knut Arild Hareide and the liberal Venstre party. The former reached 10 mandates, showing no change compared to the previous election. Venstre will be represented with 9 parliamentarians in the newly elected Storting. Therefore, a coalition consisting out of three parties might be possible, yet not desired by Erna Solberg, who already in early stages declared to search a coalition with all four parties. Despite her engagement, the relationship between Venstre and the KrF might turn out just problematic, taking into account the concerns of KrF and Venstre towards some positions of Fremdskriftspartiet. Nevertheless, both parties would be at ease to support a minority government.

Siv Jenssen, head of the far-right Fremdskriftspartiet announced, coalition talks with her might be the toughest. Despite the fact, that Fremdskriftspartiet had the biggest loss (-6.6%, 12 seats), Ms Jenssen showed severe self-esteem. The party is be-

ing perceived by foreign media as the party of the mass murderer Anders Breivik who killed over 70 youngsters on the island Utoya, regardless of distancing itself – like all other Norwegian parties as well – from the ideas and visions of Anders Breivik. A minority coalition consisting of Høyre, Venstre and Christian Democrats, supported by Fremdskriftspartiet is, so several Høyre representatives, more than unlikely. In that case, Fremdskriftspartiet would try to impulse a fundamental and destructive way of creating an opposition. Furthermore, during the election campaign both parties showed certain affection to the idea of a common coalition, therefore Fremdskriftspartiet tried to be more reluctant in their rhetoric on asylum politics and started to support tax reductions.

If both parties manage to form a coalition, a market liberalization in the fields of public health and education systems is very likely, providing a bigger opportunity of choice for citizens. Fremdskriftspartiet will fight for a stronger regulated immigration policy, hence Norwegians are going to face tough coalition talks with a strong positioned Høyre.

At the moment it is expected on completing coalition talks until the end of October, so the constituting meeting of the newly-elected Storting can take place on the 1st of October. The next years budgetary proposal of the former government will be presented during this session as well as the election for the new government will take place.