



# BULLETIN

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## COMMENTARY

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### Parliamentary election in the United Kingdom

by Bartłomiej Znojek

*The opposition Conservative Party came out the winner in the British parliamentary elections of 6 May, but it fell short of a House of Commons majority that would enable the party to govern alone. The most likely option will be a Tory minority government or a Labour-Liberal Democrats coalition.*

According to results from 646 constituencies (out of 650) in the UK parliamentary elections, the Conservative Party won the greatest number of seats in the House of Commons (304), ahead of the Labour Party (257) and the Liberal Democrats (57). With no party winning a governing majority (at least 326 seats), the following scenarios are possible: an attempt to form a minority government by the Conservatives, or negotiations on a coalition government. In the latter case, the third political force, the Liberal Democrats, would gain in importance as a possible coalition partner of one of the two biggest parties.

Labour's Gordon Brown, who will stay as Prime Minister until resignation, is formally the first to have a shot at government formation. However, Labour's number of won House of Commons seats is too small to enable the party to stay in power as minority government. The party's chances for coalition talks with the Lib Dems shrank when the latter's leader, Nick Clegg, publicly said that the Conservatives should have the initiative as the vote's winner. But Labour will not give up efforts to convince liberals of the coalition negotiations, given the proximity of both parties' political views. The most captivating offer may prove to be consent to Lib Dem demands for electoral reform and abandonment of the present first-past-the-post system which favours the biggest parties. Gordon Brown's resignation as PM could be the price Labour would have to pay. The Cabinet would likely be led then by the current home secretary, Alan Johnson, or the foreign secretary, David Miliband. But even a Labour-Lib Dem coalition would not enjoy governing majority, while the inclusion of widely scattered and ideologically diversified smaller parties, holding 28 seats between them, is an unlikely prospect.

In parallel with Labour's efforts to forge a coalition with the Liberal Democrats, the Conservatives will make their own attempt at forming a government. Given their opposition to the Lib Dem-proposed electoral reform and the wide differences between the two parties' political platforms, the Tories stand fairly low chances of wrapping up a coalition. But they will likely seek agreement with the Dem Lib on support for a minority government, an option which now seems optimal for the Conservatives. Chances of a variant where they have a try at a minority government on the basis of a deal with the smaller parties are the lowest, for similar reasons as in the case of the Labour Party — and additionally, from the Tory perspective, a minority government would involve the high risk of having to announce new elections (perhaps still this year) if a major measure is defeated in Parliament.

The magnitude of the challenges facing the new UK government will act towards a multi-party agreement, taking the form of support for a minority government or a coalition. This will be underscored by the need for a stable cabinet capable of pursuing economic policies that would help reduce an enormous fiscal deficit (close to £170bn) and a public debt approaching 70% GDP.