

## Judging the tree by its fruit

**PHILIPPE CHALON**, CHAIR OF THE CHAMBER'S ECONOMIC UPDATE FORUM, DIRECTOR OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS AT INTERNATIONAL SOS AND MANAGING DIRECTOR OF LE CERCLE D'OUTRE MANCHE, ANALYSES WHY BRITAIN UNEXPECTEDLY VOTED IN A MAJORITY CONSERVATIVE GOVERNMENT AND HOW IT MIGHT SHAPE THE COUNTRY'S FUTURE

**E**lection Forecast UK had put the probability of a hung British parliament at 97%. No one talked about anything over 300 seats, and no one even mentioned the possibility of an overall majority for the Tories. The result of the general election is the biggest surprise since 1945. Gaining five seats more than the requisite 326 to form a majority government, and with two million more votes than Labour (9,347,326), the Conservative party (11,334,520) was given a clear mandate to get on with the work they started five years ago. This personal triumph for David Cameron – and Nicola Sturgeon – will not just reshape British politics but could also reshape the future of the United Kingdom itself.

Campaigns are legendarily won or lost on the economy: 'It's the economy, stupid!'. David Cameron's return to 10 Downing Street revealed that the Tories' strength on the economy was at the heart of the party's election victory. For the past five years, the Conservatives have built their economic credibility by cutting spending and implementing a pro-business environment. As a result, Britain has enjoyed the fastest rate of growth in the G7 group of developed countries with record numbers of jobs.

Job creation figures speak for themselves: from 2010 to 2015, unemployment rate fell 2.5 points from 8 % to 5.5 %, together with a sharp increase in the labour force. In 2014 alone, over 600,000 jobs were created in the UK, bringing the total number of jobs to 31 million, a historic record. Last year, David Cameron's government helped create more than 1,500 jobs a day – as much as in the rest of the EU. The unemployment rate for young people is now back to its 2007 level at 16%: a significant drop of 50% compared to where it was only three years ago.

It is no coincidence that a hundred British business leaders publicly expressed their support for the Conservatives: all of them have seen their businesses grow again, they have created jobs and they are ready for more.

From Labour's perspective, its biggest mistake was clearly to shift towards 'Old Labour'. Labour business leaders including Lord Alan Sugar found themselves losing confidence in Ed Miliband's party because of its negative business policies. As a result, the party was portrayed as moving backwards. There was indeed a widespread belief that Labour could take Britain back to the 'nasty 1970s'.

Despite his triumph, David Cameron will have to

tackle serious issues following the SNP's almost clean sweep in Scotland and the significant vote given to UKIP (3,881,129 votes). What the election result does not show is whether or not British voters want to remain part of the EU, or even part of their own United Kingdom. This election is not the end. It is the beginning of an unpredictable time.

For the time being, let's just say that David Cameron's victory provides food for thought for political parties and leaders anywhere. The UK has shown that a government can be both reformist and popular. This is quite an achievement on its own.

It is worth mentioning that following their defeat, Ed Miliband and Nick Clegg resigned as leaders of Labour and Lib Dem. At respectively 46 and 48 years old, they already belong to the old generation of their parties. It is perhaps a sign of health that British democracy is so quick to rejuvenate. ■

### UK election results

Number of seats gained (out of 650) / share of the vote (%)

