



Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights

# REPUBLIC OF LATVIA

## PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS

4 October 2014

OSCE/ODIHR Election Assessment Mission  
Final Report



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**REPUBLIC OF LATVIA  
PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS  
4 October 2014**

**OSCE/ODIHR Election Assessment Mission Final Report<sup>1</sup>**

**I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Following an invitation from the Permanent Mission of the Republic of Latvia and based on the recommendation of a Needs Assessment Mission, the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE/ODIHR) deployed an Election Assessment Mission (EAM) to observe the 4 October parliamentary elections. The EAM focused on the amended electoral legal framework and its implementation, political party and campaign financing, and media coverage of the campaign.

The electoral legal framework generally provides a sound basis for the conduct of democratic elections and election stakeholders expressed high confidence in the overall process. Voters had an opportunity to make a choice among a field of 13 candidate lists presenting different political alternatives and registered by the Central Election Commission (CEC) in an inclusive manner. The election administration performed its duties in an impartial and transparent manner and managed the process efficiently. The media covered the election campaign extensively, including through a number of televised debates. However, OSCE/ODIHR EAM interlocutors expressed concerns about the objectivity of several private outlets due to perceived affiliations with political actors. While new campaign finance regulations improved transparency, they could benefit from further review.

Elections are regulated primarily by the Constitution and the election law. While the 2014 amendments addressed some previous OSCE/ODIHR recommendations, certain aspects of the legislation could benefit from further review, particularly the absence of provisions for independent candidates as provided for in paragraph 7.5 of the 1990 OSCE Copenhagen Document, restrictions on candidacy rights for ex-prisoners and individuals subject to lustration, as well as existing defamation provisions, which run contrary to OSCE commitments and other international obligations and standards. In a positive development, candidates were no longer required to submit a self-evaluation of their proficiency in the Latvian language.

Although the legal framework provides for political party observers, non-partisan citizen and international observation are not explicitly foreseen, which is not fully in line with paragraph 8 of the 1990 OSCE Copenhagen Document. Nevertheless, the OSCE/ODIHR EAM had unrestricted access to all aspects of the electoral process.

While citizenship is recognized as an admissible restriction to suffrage, the existence of a considerable number of non-citizens who are not able to vote remains a concern. In a positive development, amendments to citizenship law simplified procedures for granting citizenship to children of non-citizens.

The campaign took place in an open and peaceful environment, with respect for fundamental freedoms of expression, association and assembly. In a political environment divided along ethnic and linguistic lines, the main topics of the campaign included national security, as a result of the crisis in and around Ukraine, as well the defence budget and economy. Paid political advertising was prohibited on television for the last 30 days of the campaign, which was generally viewed by

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<sup>1</sup> The English version of this report is the only official document. An unofficial translation is available in Latvian.

stakeholders as a positive development that encouraged contestants to focus on substantive policy issues.

New regulations on campaign funding appeared to have improved the transparency. In 2014, the Council of Europe's Group of States against Corruption (GRECO) concluded that Latvia had satisfactorily implemented a number of its previous recommendations. Some aspects, however, need improvement to enhance transparency and accountability, particularly on public reporting. The scrutiny of campaign expenses was diligently implemented by the Corruption Prevention and Combating Bureau; however, some of its decisions, including those imposing sanctions, were not published, diminishing transparency.

While the constitutionally guaranteed freedom of expression and prohibition of censorship were upheld, defamation remains a criminal offence, contrary to good practice. The economic recession has had a detrimental effect on the media environment, prompting a number of mergers and increasing consolidation of ownership. This combined with the lack of transparency of media ownership has limited the diversity of content and of views. The campaign was widely covered in broadcast, print and online media, and candidates benefitted from free airtime on public television and radio. Some concerns were raised about the functioning of the National Electronic Media Council, the media regulatory body, and how its members are appointed.

In line with the OSCE/ODIHR's methodology, the EAM did not observe election day process in a systematic or comprehensive manner. However, mission members visited a limited number of polling stations on election day. In polling stations observed, the voting process was well managed and appeared calm, smooth and transparent, although at times the secrecy of the vote was undermined due to overcrowding or inappropriate voting booths. The ballot scanning technology facilitated the vote count and the tabulation process and results were announced in a timely and transparent manner.

## II. INTRODUCTION AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Following an invitation from the Permanent Mission of the Republic of Latvia to the OSCE to observe the 4 October 2014 parliamentary elections and based on the recommendation of a Needs Assessment Mission conducted from 10 to 12 June, the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE/ODIHR) deployed an Election Assessment Mission (EAM) for these elections.<sup>2</sup>

The OSCE/ODIHR EAM was headed by Nikolai Vulchanov, and consisted of six election experts from six OSCE participating States. The EAM was based in Riga, but experts visited several municipalities during the campaign and on election day. The electoral process was assessed for its compliance with OSCE commitments, other international obligations and standards for democratic elections and with national legislation. In line with the OSCE/ODIHR's methodology, the EAM did not observe election day proceedings in a systematic or comprehensive manner. However, mission members visited a limited number of polling stations.

The OSCE/ODIHR EAM wishes to thank the authorities of the Republic of Latvia for the invitation to observe these elections, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Central Election Commission (CEC) and other authorities for their assistance and co-operation. The OSCE/ODIHR EAM also

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<sup>2</sup> All previous OSCE/ODIHR reports on Latvia are available at: <http://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/latvia>.

wishes to express gratitude to the representatives of political parties, candidates, media, civil society and other interlocutors for sharing their views.

### III. BACKGROUND

Latvia is a parliamentary republic with legislative powers vested in the 100-member unicameral parliament (*Saeima*). Executive power is exercised by the government, led by the prime minister. The president has a primarily ceremonial role as head of state and is elected by the parliament.

The last parliamentary elections were held on 17 September 2011,<sup>3</sup> leading to a centre-right coalition government comprising the Unity Party, the National Alliance, Everything for Latvia! – for Fatherland and Freedom/LNNK, and Zatlers' Reform Party. Despite winning the highest number of seats, the left-leaning Harmony Centre, supported mainly by the country's Russian-speaking population, remained in opposition along with the Union of Greens and Farmers.

Following the resignation of the Prime Minister in November 2013,<sup>4</sup> a new government was formed on the basis of the same coalition with the addition of the Union of Greens and Farmers. The Harmony Centre was left as the only opposition party.<sup>5</sup> In an environment, where the political landscape is generally divided along ethnic and linguistic lines, parties are broadly perceived as representing either Latvian speakers or the country's Russian speaking population, many of whom are non-citizens. Recent events in Ukraine brought national security issues to the forefront and became an important topic in the pre-election period.

In addition to political parties represented in the outgoing parliament, these elections were contested by four newly established parties, including, most notably, Sincerely for Latvia and Alliance of Latvian Regions. Zatlers' Reform Party, which held 22 seats in the outgoing parliament, dissolved several months before the elections and did not participate.

### IV. ELECTORAL SYSTEM

The parliament is elected for a four-year term by proportional representation through open party lists in five multi-member constituencies. The number of seats elected in each constituency is determined by the CEC based on the number of eligible voters in each constituency according to the population registry four months before elections.<sup>6</sup> Voters residing abroad are included in the constituency of Riga.

Candidate lists that receive more than five per cent of the valid votes cast in all constituencies are eligible for seat allocation. Within each constituency, seats are allocated to candidate lists in proportion to the votes cast using the *Sainte-Laguë* method.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> The Constitution provides for a four-year parliamentary mandate but in case of early elections the mandate is reduced to three years.

<sup>4</sup> The prime minister resigned from office having taken political responsibility for the national tragedy of a supermarket collapse in Riga with several fatalities.

<sup>5</sup> In January 2014, Unity Party's Laimdota Straujuma was appointed prime minister upon the nomination of the president.

<sup>6</sup> For these elections, 32 members of parliament were elected in Riga, 26 in Vidzeme, 15 in Latgale, 13 in Kurzeme, and 14 in Zemgale.

<sup>7</sup> The *Sainte-Laguë* method is a highest quotient method for allocating seats in a party-list proportional representation system.

The open list system allows for positive and negative preference votes. Voters may indicate their support for an entire candidate list or express their preference for as many candidates as they wish within a list by marking a “+” next to their name in the ballot, and may reject a candidate by crossing out his or her name. The order of election within a list is determined by the number of preference votes that candidates receive. The number of votes gained by a candidate is calculated by adding the number of votes that his or her list received to the number of positive preference votes, minus the number of negative preferences. Those candidates with the highest number of votes within a list win the seats allocated to that list. If two or more candidates on the same list receive an equal number of votes, they are ranked in the same order as on the ballot.

## V. LEGAL FRAMEWORK

The legal framework for parliamentary elections primarily comprises the Constitution, and the *Saeima* Election Law (election law). Other applicable legislation includes the Law on Political Parties, the Law on Pre-election Campaign, the Law on Financing Political Organizations, the Electronic Mass Media Law, and the Law on the Central Election Commission. These are supplemented by instructions and decisions issued by the CEC.

In 2014, the legal framework was revised, addressing some previous OSCE/ODIHR recommendations.<sup>8</sup> Amendments to the election law included the removal of the restriction on the right to vote for persons with mental disabilities, introduction of detailed regulations on homebound voting and provisions for voting by military personnel deployed abroad. In addition, the election law introduced the possibility to vote three days before election day and new regulations for voter identification. Changes to the Law on Pre-Election Campaign banned paid political advertising on television during the 30 days prior to election day. While it is not a good practice to amend fundamental aspects of the legal framework less than one year before an election, the amendments enjoyed cross-party consensus and were the result of an inclusive process. The majority of OSCE/ODIHR EAM interlocutors positively assessed the amendments and did not express any concerns as to the consistency of their implementation.<sup>9</sup>

The legal framework provides a generally sound basis for the conduct of democratic elections. However, certain aspects remain to be addressed to bring the legislation fully in line with OSCE commitments and other international obligations and standards for democratic elections. These include provisions on candidacy rights, defamation, election observation and effective legal redress.

## VI. ELECTION ADMINISTRATION

Elections were administered by a three-level election administration, comprising the CEC, 119 Municipal Election Commissions (MECs) and 1,054 Polling Station Commissions (PSCs), including 98 abroad in 41 countries. The election administration performed its duties in an impartial and transparent manner and managed the process efficiently. In general, the OSCE/ODIHR EAM interlocutors expressed a high level of confidence in the professionalism of the election administration at all levels.

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<sup>8</sup> Amendments were introduced to the Constitution, the election law, the Law on Pre-election Campaign, and the Law on Financing Political Organizations.

<sup>9</sup> Section II.2.b of the 2002 Council of Europe’s Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission) Code of Good Practice in Electoral Matters, provides that “the fundamental elements of electoral law [...] should not be open to amendment less than one year before an election”.

The CEC is a permanent body appointed every four years and has overall responsibility for the elections. It is composed of nine members: eight are appointed by the parliament on the basis of party nominations, and one is a judge nominated by the Supreme Court. The CEC invested considerable effort in informing all electoral participants about the new procedural aspects of the elections. In addition to offering an online training course on its website for commission members and potential citizen observers, the CEC delivered a number of trainings for PSC members. It also conducted a broad voter information campaign through public notices, posters, clips aired on public and private broadcasters, and newspaper advertisements. However, some aspects of it, in particular on the use of temporary voting cards, appeared to be insufficient, given the issues observed with regard to the use of such cards on election day.

MECs oversee the electoral process at the municipal level. They are appointed for four-year terms and consist of 7 to 15 members appointed by local councils upon nominations from political parties or groups of at least 10 voters. Election day voting and counting processes are conducted by seven-member PSCs appointed by MECs for each election. Political parties and groups of at least 10 voters have a right to nominate PSC members. A number of OSCE/ODIHR interlocutors expressed concerns about people's willingness to serve as PSC members.

The election administration at all levels used a new information system "BALSIS" to facilitate a number of election procedures, including candidate registration, recording of election day complaints at PSCs, and the transmission of electronic result protocols from MECs to the CEC. The OSCE/ODIHR EAM was granted limited access to observe the setup and operation of the BALSIS system. The CEC indicated that it could not extend this access because it had no property rights on the system.

*The transparency of the information system BALSIS would be enhanced by providing accredited observers with meaningful access to key stages of its setup and its operation, as well as documentation about the system.*

In addition, in order to facilitate the counting and the tabulation process, PSCs were given a choice to use ballot scanning technology. As in the case of regular vote counting and tabulation processes, candidates had the opportunity to object to election results for specific polling stations and request re-counts either based on digital images of the ballots, or original ballot papers.

## **VII. VOTER RIGHTS, REGISTRATION AND IDENTIFICATION**

The right to vote is granted to all citizens who are 18 years of age or older on election day. There is no voter registration in Latvia. Voters may cast a vote at any polling station in the country or abroad, independent of their residence upon the presentation of a valid passport. After voting, a voter's passport is stamped as a safeguard against possible multiple voting and his or her name is added to a list of voters drawn up in the polling station on election day.

For these elections there were 1,552,235 eligible citizens with the right to vote. The Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs (OCMA) identified some 27,520 citizens who did not possess a valid passport as of 22 September 2014. To avoid potential disenfranchisement, citizens could apply for a temporary voter card at the regional offices of the OCMA between 22 September and 3 October. Despite efforts made by the CEC and the OCMA to inform voters, only 4,871 citizens used this opportunity.

Voters outside of the country on election day could vote in-person at diplomatic representations or by post. According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 16,436 voters registered to vote abroad. Voters wishing to cast a postal vote from abroad had to identify themselves by submitting their passport with their application to vote by mail to the relevant diplomatic representation. Postal vote applications were submitted from 5 May to 12 September. Only 425 applications for postal voting were received by 22 diplomatic representations.

### VIII. CANDIDATE RIGHTS AND REGISTRATION

Every citizen who is at least 21 years old can stand for parliamentary elections, with the exception of those who are declared incompetent by a court decision, those sentenced for intentionally committed crimes, and those serving prison terms, whose sentence has not been expunged. The blanket restriction on ex-prisoners, irrespective of the gravity of the crime, imposes an unreasonable restriction on the right to be elected and is contrary to international obligations.<sup>10</sup>

*The blanket withdrawal of candidate rights of citizens who have committed a crime, irrespective of its gravity, is a disproportionate limitation and should be removed from the law.*

In addition, although amendments to the election law enacted in 2009 narrowed the scope of lustration provisions so that they no longer apply to individuals who held technical support positions, the restrictions as such remain. On 8 May 2014, the parliament extended the validity of the relevant legislation for another 30 years.<sup>11</sup> The OSCE/ODIHR and the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) have previously observed that these provisions violate the right to stand for election and advised that they be revised.

*Notwithstanding the narrowed scope, further review of lustration provisions should be undertaken.*

In order to participate in elections, candidates have to be registered either with a political party or a coalition. It is not possible to stand in elections as an independent candidate, contrary to paragraph 7.5 of the 1990 OSCE Copenhagen Document.<sup>12</sup>

*In line with previous OSCE/ODIHR recommendations and with OSCE commitments, which specifically protect the right of individual candidates to run for office, the legislation should be revised to enable candidates to run independently.*

In an inclusive process, the CEC registered eleven political parties and two coalitions that contested all five constituencies, with a total of 1,156 candidates including 774 men and 382 women. There

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<sup>10</sup> Paragraph 15 of the 1996 UN Human Rights Committee (UNHRC) General Comment No. 25 to Article 25 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) states that “any restrictions on the right to stand... must be justifiable on objective and reasonable criteria. Persons who are otherwise eligible to stand for election should not be excluded by unreasonable or discriminatory requirements.”

<sup>11</sup> The 1994 State Security Committee Document Law for use of files maintained by the Centre for the Documentation of the Consequences of Totalitarianism provided that the information of possible co-operation with the *KGB* should not be used after 10 years from its enactment. In 2004, the parliament extended this period for an additional 10 years. Amendments to the State Security Committee Document Law, adopted on 8 May 2014, state that the restrictions shall be effective for 50 years, thus extending its applicability for another 30 years. The 2014 amendments to the State Security Committee Document Law also mandate that the Cabinet of Ministers reviews the need of these provisions at least every five years.

<sup>12</sup> Paragraph 7.5 of the 1990 OSCE Copenhagen Document states that “participating States will [...] respect the right to citizens to seek political or public office, individually or as representatives of political parties or organizations, without discrimination.”

are no legislative measures to promote women candidates. Although 382 of candidates were women, only 19 were elected.

*Consideration could be given to introducing temporary special legislative measures to promote women's political participation. Political parties could consider nominating a minimum number of candidates of each gender.*

In order to register, political parties and coalitions had to submit their candidate lists to the CEC from 16 July to 5 August along with a financial deposit of EUR 1,400.<sup>13</sup> In a positive development, candidates were no longer required to submit a self-assessment of their proficiency in the Latvian language. Instead, candidates had to sign a declaration confirming their eligibility, including that their knowledge of the Latvian language was sufficient to perform their duties as a member of parliament.

## IX. NON-CITIZEN AND NATIONAL MINORITY PARTICIPATION

The resident population of Latvia includes representatives of a number of ethnic and linguistic minorities. Ethnic Latvians make up 61.4 per cent of the resident population while ethnic Russians, the largest minority, make up 26 per cent.<sup>14</sup> According to the 2011 census, 62 per cent of the population speaks Latvian at home, while 37 per cent speak Russian. During the registration process, candidates were given an option to declare their ethnicity. While 24.7 per cent of candidates opted not to record their ethnic background, from those who declared, 64.7 per cent were ethnic Latvians, 6.9 per cent ethnic Russians and 1.5 per cent ethnic Polish.

After the restoration of independence in 1991, citizenship was granted automatically to holders of Latvian citizenship prior to 1940 and their descendants, leaving a large number of Latvian residents without citizenship of Latvia or another country.<sup>15</sup> The vast majority of non-citizens are persons belonging to national minorities. As of 1 July 2014, the number of non-citizens was 276,797, which constitutes 12.7 per cent of the population, including some 263,000 non-citizens of voting age.<sup>16</sup> Non-citizens do not have the right to vote or stand in elections, although they have the right to join political parties as long as they do not make up half or more of members. While citizenship is recognized as an acceptable requirement for suffrage in national elections, it remains a concern that a significant number of persons belonging to national minorities cannot participate in the electoral process.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> The financial deposit is returned in case a candidate list receives at least two per cent of the valid votes cast. It is otherwise transferred to the state budget.

<sup>14</sup> According to the Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia, as of the beginning of 2014, see: [www.csb.gov.lv](http://www.csb.gov.lv). Other minorities include 3.4 per cent Belarusians, 2.3 per cent Ukrainians and 2.2 per cent Poles. Groups making up less than 2 per cent each of the population include Lithuanians, Jews and Roma.

<sup>15</sup> Latvia ratified the Council of Europe Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities in 2005 with a declaration defining national minorities as citizens who *inter alia* differ from Latvians in terms of culture, language and religion; however, the declaration also states that permanent residents of Latvia who are not citizens of Latvia or another state and identify themselves with a national minority can also enjoy the rights prescribed in the Convention. See: <http://conventions.coe.int/Treaty/Commun/ListeDeclarations.asp?CL=ENG&NT=157&VL=1>.

<sup>16</sup> According to information provided to the OSCE/ODIHR by the OCMA, as of 1 October 2014.

<sup>17</sup> See, for example, the 2006 Venice Commission Report on Non-citizens and Minority Rights.

The annual naturalization rate of Latvian non-citizens declined after the peak of 2004 when Latvia became a member of the European Union.<sup>18</sup> The OSCE/ODIHR EAM was informed that remaining non-citizens often did not see enough practical benefits to becoming Latvian citizens. In a positive development, on 1 October 2013, amendments to the Citizenship Law came into force that expand the categories of persons who are exempt from some or all naturalization examinations and provide simplified procedures for granting citizenship to children born in Latvia to non-citizens upon birth registration at the will of one rather than both parents, as it was previously required.

*In order to promote inclusive political participation, authorities should explore ways to increase the naturalization rate such as conducting campaigns to promote naturalization, publicizing opportunities for simplified naturalization under the revised Citizenship Law, and expanding the availability of free opportunities to learn Latvian. Civil society organizations should be supported in efforts to encourage non-citizens to complete the naturalization process.*

In general, OSCE/ODIHR EAM interlocutors noted that citizens whose first language is not Latvian generally had adequate access to election-related information; however, detailed voter information in other than Latvian language was lacking.<sup>19</sup> On a positive note, the CEC website contained comprehensive information on the process in Latvian, as well as summaries in Russian and English. It also ran a 24-hour telephone hotline with information provided in both, Latvian and Russian languages.

*Consideration could be given to providing a broader voter education in minority languages to reach out to national minority voters.*

## **X. CAMPAIGN ENVIRONMENT**

The official election campaign began on 14 June and ended at midnight on 3 October. Recent changes to the Law on Pre-election Campaign consolidated campaign regulations for all elections. The law also introduced a ban on publications about candidates or individuals associated with political parties 30 days prior to the elections, with the aim of preventing the abuse of state resources for campaign purposes.

The campaign was held with respect for fundamental freedoms of expression, association and assembly. However, some OSCE/ODIHR EAM interlocutors raised concerns that restrictive municipal regulations and high prices of public billboards limited their capacity to campaign. A decision by Riga council, which is governed by the Harmony Centre, on the size of billboards that would be permitted in the city's historical centre was perceived as politically motivated as it was adopted only three days before the start of the official campaign, after most contracts for printing of campaign posters had been concluded.

Generally, electoral contestants ran modest campaigns, even during the final week, with campaign messages largely reflecting the ethnic and linguistic divisions between parties. The campaign was primarily conducted in the broadcast media via participation in public debates and interview programmes. In addition, the biggest parties relied heavily on Internet platforms, with a focus on

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<sup>18</sup> According to the OCMA, the number of naturalizations was 2,467 in 2011; 2,213 in 2012; and 1,732 in 2013. See: <http://www.pmlp.gov.lv>.

<sup>19</sup> Paragraph 12 of the 1996 UNHRC General Comment 25 on Article 25 of the ICCPR recommends that "information and materials about voting should be available in minority languages". Paragraph 32.5 of the 1990 OSCE Copenhagen Document states that "persons belonging to national minorities have the right [...] to disseminate, have access to and exchange information in their mother tongue".

social media such as Facebook or Twitter and also on individual websites. Other means of campaigning included distribution of leaflets in public places, as well as group meetings.

The crisis in and around Ukraine had an impact on Latvian politics and brought national security issues to the forefront of the campaign. Other issues raised during the campaign included the defence budget, dependence on Russian gas imports, the economy, the health system, emigration, and the sale of the national *Citadele* Bank to private investors. In addition, issues related to national minorities, including the status of the Russian language and the system of state-funded education in minority languages, featured in some party programmes and were discussed in pre-election debates. The media also featured reports about alleged links between some parties and the Russian Federation.<sup>20</sup> There were only a few women candidates visible during the campaign and there were no special electoral platforms targeting women voters.

## **XI. CAMPAIGN FINANCE**

### **A. OVERVIEW**

Campaign financing is regulated by the Law on Financing Political Organizations, last amended in 2014. The latest amendments lowered donation limits from individuals and introduced public funding for parties or coalitions. These regulations are supplemented by the 2013 Law on Pre-election Campaign which provides measures to prevent incumbents from using administrative resources for political purposes.

The Council of Europe's Group of States against Corruption (GRECO), in its third evaluation round in 2014, concluded that Latvia had implemented satisfactorily a number of its previous recommendations, including regulation of third parties in election campaigns, increased limitation periods for violation of political financing rules, and enhanced liability of individuals for violations of these rules.<sup>21</sup> Most OSCE/ODIHR EAM interlocutors agreed that the new regulations on campaign funding and expenditures reduced the influence of money on the campaign, while some argued that campaign finance regulations were administratively burdensome.

### **B. CAMPAIGN CONTRIBUTIONS AND EXPENDITURES**

The Law on Financing Political Organizations provides that parties may be financed by membership fees, donations from individuals, income earned through parties' economic activities, the state budget, and other sources not specifically prohibited by the law. The law forbids donations from legal entities, as well as anonymous and foreign sources. Parties are not allowed to take or issue loans. Candidates can donate to their own campaign, but according to the limits established for donations from individual persons.

As of January 2012, public funds are distributed to political parties that gained more than two per cent of votes in the previous parliamentary elections in an amount proportional to the number of votes received. Six parties qualified for public funding, with the state budget allocating a total of EUR 629,303 to support parties.<sup>22</sup> Those parties who were eligible for such funding had to open a

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<sup>20</sup> For example, former Auditor General Inguna Sudraba, leader of the Sincerely for Latvia party, was targeted in media reports for alleged ties with Russian officials and business.

<sup>21</sup> See GRECO Evaluation Report on Latvia, 28 March 2014: [http://www.coe.int/t/dghl/monitoring/greco/evaluations/round3/GrecoRC3\(2014\)3\\_Second\\_ADD\\_Latvia\\_EN.pdf](http://www.coe.int/t/dghl/monitoring/greco/evaluations/round3/GrecoRC3(2014)3_Second_ADD_Latvia_EN.pdf).

<sup>22</sup> Harmony received EUR184,923, Zatlers' Reform Party - EUR 135,781, Unity Party - EUR 122,767, National Alliance - EUR 90,500, Union of Greens and Farmers - EUR 79,649, and LPP/LC - EUR 15,744.

special bank account to receive these funds, however, there is no obligation for other contestants to open a designated bank account for campaign purposes.<sup>23</sup>

*To enhance transparency and accountability, consideration could be given to requiring all electoral contestants to open dedicated bank accounts for campaign financing, through which all campaign transactions should be made.*

Citizens with full suffrage rights and non-citizens may contribute up to EUR 16,000 to a political party per year. This limit is indexed against inflation to ensure that the amount remains reasonable.<sup>24</sup> However, the effectiveness of this limit may be undermined as a person is allowed to donate to an unlimited number of parties, including parties within a coalition and to the coalition itself.<sup>25</sup>

*Consideration could be given to reviewing the legislation to prevent multiple donations to individual parties within coalitions.*

Private funds (individual donations and membership fees) constituted the main source of funding for electoral contestants. Campaign expenditures of small parties were mostly covered by the candidates themselves and to a lesser extent by their limited membership fees.

Total campaign expenditures per candidate must not exceed EUR 422,997, which represents a slight increase since the last parliamentary elections.<sup>26</sup> The majority of OSCE/ODIHR EAM interlocutors positively assessed the campaign spending limit and stated that it reduced the influence of wealthy businesspeople in politics.

### C. REPORTING AND OVERSIGHT REQUIREMENTS

The Corruption Prevention and Combating Bureau (KNAB), an institution under the Cabinet of Ministers, is tasked with the oversight of party and campaign financing. The KNAB consists of a number of professional officials managed by the director, who is appointed by the Cabinet of Ministers for a five-year term in the open competition. In its 2014 evaluation report, GRECO noted that measures were taken to “improve the recruitment procedures of the staff of the [KNAB] and eliminate political interference in the selection process of its Director”. However, it also called for “other complementary measures necessary to strengthen the independence of the KNAB, including as regards the supervision of its activities and the procedure for deciding its budget, have not yet been taken.”<sup>27</sup> In addition, a perceived internal personal issue within the KNAB leadership remained unresolved during the election campaign. According to most OSCE/ODIHR EAM interlocutors,

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<sup>23</sup> Paragraph 199 of the 2010 OSCE/ODIHR and Venice Commission Guidelines on Political Party Regulation states the notes that “parties should also be required to file basic information with the appropriate state authority ... prior to the beginning of campaigning. Such information should include the party’s bank account information and the personal information of those persons accountable for the party’s finances.”

<sup>24</sup> The limit should not exceed the amount of 50 minimum monthly salaries over a period of one calendar year. A minimum monthly salary constitutes EUR 320, as per information published by the Corruption Prevention and Combating Bureau at: [www.knab.gov.lv/lv/finances/for\\_donators/](http://www.knab.gov.lv/lv/finances/for_donators/).

<sup>25</sup> Paragraph 175 of the 2010 OSCE/ODIHR and Venice Commission Guidelines on Political Party Regulation states that a “reasonable limitations on private contributions may include the determination of a maximum level that may be contributed by a single donor. Such limitation has been shown to be effective in minimizing the possibility of corruption or the purchasing of political influence.”

<sup>26</sup> For the 2011 early parliamentary elections the limit was LAT 282,559, currently EUR 402,046.

<sup>27</sup> See also the OSCE/ODIHR Opinion On the Law on the Bureau on Prevention and Combating of Corruption of Latvia, (Opinion No: GEN-LV/265/2014), 17 November 2014. Available at: <http://www.osce.org/odihr/126883>.

this damaged KNAB's public image, but did not appear to affect the capacity of the institution to perform its legal duties in a timely and efficient manner.

There is no obligation for public campaign finance reporting prior to elections but all electoral contestants are required to disclose to the KNAB their campaign contributions and expenses 30 days after elections. The KNAB has six months to review these reports and can impose a range of sanctions for non-compliance. All electoral contestants are also obliged to submit an annual report to the KNAB by 31 March every year. As a transparency mechanism, all finance reports are published on KNAB's website. Although not required by law, upon its own initiative the KNAB monitored expenses during the campaign on the basis of invoices requested from electoral contestants and issued weekly statements at the beginning and on a daily basis during the last week of the campaign.

*Consideration could be given to requiring all electoral contestants to provide reports on their campaign income and expenses before election day, according to a standardized template and within an acceptable time limit. These could be made public, in a timely manner, in order to improve transparency and accountability.*

At the end of the campaign, the KNAB stated that it had opened investigations into a total of 33 cases of alleged campaign finance irregularities. The Criminal Code foresees individual criminal liability for various breaches of campaign finance regulations, varying from a fine to a prison term. KNAB decisions can be appealed to the District Administrative Court. Earlier, on 15 July 2014, the KNAB sanctioned the Union of Greens and Farmers by banning it from receiving public funding during one year for improper use of funds.<sup>28</sup> These decisions were not published by the KNAB, challenging the transparency of the process.

*In order to further enhance transparency and public trust in the process, it is recommended that KNAB decisions, including those imposing sanctions, be published in a timely manner.*

According to information released by the parties, the biggest campaign spenders were Sincerely for Latvia, Union of Greens and Farmers, and Unity Party with some EUR 400,000 campaign expenses, almost the maximum allowed. Growth and the New Conservative Party spent less than EUR 10,000 each, while Sovereignty and Freedom from Fear, Hate and Anger reported no campaign spending at the end of the campaign.

## **XII. MEDIA**

### **A. MEDIA ENVIRONMENT**

The media landscape includes numerous broadcast and print outlets, offering citizens a range of views. However, the economic recession has had a detrimental effect on the media environment, prompting a number of mergers and increased consolidation of ownership, which has limited diversity of content and views. In addition, OSCE/ODIHR EAM interlocutors expressed concerns about the objectivity of several private outlets due to perceived affiliations with political actors.

The majority of OSCE/ODIHR EAM interlocutors noted that broadcasting policy had been strongly influenced by recent events in Ukraine, which deepened the division within the media sector along linguistic lines. In response to these events, significant public investment has been made to increase

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<sup>28</sup>

Three other parties were sanctioned in 2014 but none of them competed in these elections.

the production of Russian language content on public TV and radio. This was widely seen by OSCE/ODIHR EAM interlocutors as a positive step contributing to the creation of a more balanced information space for the Russian-speaking population.

While use of the Internet is growing, television remains the main news source, followed by daily newspapers.<sup>29</sup> The public broadcaster, Latvian Television (LTV), operates LTV1 and LTV7, which broadcast in Latvian language, including some content in Russian language. The main commercial channels include Latvian language TV3 and LNT, as well as Russian language TV5, all owned by the Swedish Modern Times Group (MTG).<sup>30</sup> Other channels include the Russian language First Baltic Channel (PBK); as well as Russian public and private channels. Several OSCE/ODIHR EAM interlocutors expressed concerns about media plurality and diversity due to the concentration of ownership by MTG.<sup>31</sup>

*Given the importance of media diversity to democracy, measures to limit concentration of media ownership, or promote internal pluralism of media, could be considered. In addition, efforts could be made to introduce more stringent laws on transparency of media company ownership.*

Public radio channels include LR1, LR2 and the Russian language LR4, which are supplemented by private radio stations SWH and Star FM. The main national Latvian language daily papers are *Diena* of the *Diena* Media News group, *Neatkarīga Avīze* and *Latvijas Avīze*, and the weekly news magazine *Ir*. Russian language daily papers *Chas* and *Telegraf* were merged with what is now Latvia's only Russian language daily, *Vesti Segodnya*. A number of OSCE/ODIHR EAM interlocutors noted the practice by some newspapers to allow journalists to interview only a limited circle of sources for their articles, thereby restricting the independence of the media.<sup>32</sup>

## **B. LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR MEDIA**

Many principles important to free speech and a free press are enshrined in the Constitution, the Law on Pre-election Campaign, and the Law on Electronic Mass Media, including freedom of expression, prohibition of censorship, as well as requirements for impartial and accurate broadcasting and equitable access to media by electoral contestants. All OSCE/ODIHR EAM interlocutors agreed that these principles and freedoms are largely upheld. However, contrary to good practice, defamation remains a criminal offence.<sup>33</sup>

*Consideration should be given to decriminalize defamation, in line with international obligations on freedom of expression.*

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<sup>29</sup> In Latvia, 76 per cent of the population is using the Internet. See: <http://www.internetlivestats.com/internet-users-by-country/>.

<sup>30</sup> In total, MTG owns six television channels, one radio station and a video streaming portal and website.

<sup>31</sup> The 2010 Joint Declaration by the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Opinion and Expression, the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, the Organization of American States Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression and the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights Special Rapporteur on key challenges to media freedom notes that "growing concentration of ownership of the media, with serious potential implications for content diversity" is a concern. See: <http://www.osce.org/fom/41439>.

<sup>32</sup> According to paragraph 13 of the 2011 UNHRC General Comment No. 34, "free, uncensored and unhindered press or other media is essential in any society to ensure freedom of opinion and expression and the enjoyment of other Covenant rights."

<sup>33</sup> Paragraph 47 of the 2011 UNHRC General Comment No. 34 provides that states "should consider the decriminalization of defamation and, in any case, the application of the criminal law should only be countenanced in the most serious of cases and imprisonment is never an appropriate penalty."

The Law on Pre-election Campaign regulates media coverage of elections. It grants each party the right to 40 minutes of free airtime on public television and radio (four slots of five minutes on each), addressing a prior OSCE/ODIHR recommendation. Following the 2014 amendments, paid political advertising on television is prohibited during the last 30 days of the campaign. While new and opposition parties said that this favoured incumbents, the move was generally viewed by stakeholders as a positive development that encouraged contestants to focus on substantive policy issues.

The National Electronic Media Council (NEMC) oversees the media coverage of elections and compliance with legal requirements. A number of OSCE/ODIHR EAM interlocutors expressed concerns about parliament's role in the appointment of NEMC members and that this may undermine its impartiality.<sup>34</sup>

*Consideration could be given to reviewing the manner of selecting the members of the NEMC with a view to protecting the body from possible political interference.*

For these elections the NEMC published guidelines on implementing the Electronic Mass Media Law. It outsourced the task of media monitoring of the campaign, which consisted of checking news and politics-related programmes for possible breaches of this law, but did not provide a quantitative and qualitative analysis of campaign coverage. The NEMC did not report on its interim findings during the campaign.

*Consideration could be given to using a media monitoring methodology that provides a more detailed picture of campaign coverage. The release of interim monitoring results during the campaign and full results immediately after election day would render the council's work more effective and transparent.*

The NEMC brought to the attention of KNAB one complaint against a radio station that allegedly broadcast campaign material without submitting its advertising prices to the NEMC, as required by law. At least two cases of possible breaches of media regulations were brought to the attention of the NEMC, with decisions pending at the time of writing of this report. Most OSCE/ODIHR EAM interlocutors noted that the three-month ban imposed by the NEMC earlier this year on retransmitted broadcasts of Russian public TV channel *Rossiya RTR* was ineffective because the channel remained widely available via satellite broadcasts during this time.

### **C. MEDIA COVERAGE OF ELECTIONS**

The media played a significant role in the election campaign. All electoral contestants were given access to public television and radio to present their campaigns. Voters had access to a variety of views and information about the candidates in a number of media outlets, including print, broadcast and online media.

In accordance with media legislation, the public broadcaster LTV covered the campaign extensively through free airtime as well as debates and special programmes. Latvian language debates on LTV1 were not simultaneously translated into Russian, a practice that was tested in previous elections. According to OSCE/ODIHR EAM interlocutors from the public broadcaster this was due to a significant drop in audience ratings. However, new Russian language content on LTV7 and LR4

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<sup>34</sup> According to the Electronic Mass Media Law, the NEMC comprises five members elected by the parliament. Candidates are nominated by the Commission of Human Rights and Public Affairs of the parliament. NEMC members may not be affiliated with political parties or have shares in a broadcast media company.

was broadly welcomed by OSCE/ODIHR EAM interlocutors, suggesting that keeping this practice would help provide a more balanced information space for the Russian-speaking population.

The campaign was widely covered on talk shows and current affairs programmes. *Domburs' Studio*, a talk show on LNT, focused on the main political issues and hosted discussions between candidates. The programme *De Facto* on LTV1 drew attention to different parties' failures and the challenges facing Latvian society. TV5's "job interviews" of candidates in its programme *Nasha Tema* was a lively addition to election coverage. Seven public-funded debates were also televised on private channels.<sup>35</sup> The campaign was also extensively covered in the press and online, including critical analysis of campaign platforms.

### XIII. CITIZEN AND INTERNATIONAL OBSERVATION

Political parties and coalitions have full access to all stages of the electoral process through delegating up to two representatives to each election commission. However, the law makes no specific reference to non-partisan citizen and international observers and does not contain detailed provisions on accreditation procedures.<sup>36</sup> Partially addressing previous OSCE/ODIHR recommendations, on 3 September the CEC issued a decision on the procedure for accreditation of observers, as well as party and media representatives in elections. In addition, to encourage citizen observation, the CEC offered an online course.

*In order to create the legal basis for the effective implementation of Paragraph 8 of the 1990 Copenhagen Document and to ensure full access to all stages of the election process to observers, consideration should be given to introducing an explicit provision for election observation, in particular setting out rights and responsibilities of observers as well as accreditation arrangements.*

### XIV. COMPLAINTS AND APPEALS

The legal framework regulating the complaints and appeals system generally ensures effective legal remedy. However, while the process enjoys widespread confidence among OSCE/ODIHR EAM interlocutors, some aspects would benefit from further review in order to comply fully with OSCE commitments and other international obligations.

The legislation is imprecise about the channels and process of complaints and appeals within the different election administration bodies. For example, while the election law provides that election day violations pertaining to the voting process can be challenged with the PSC chairperson, it fails to define any procedure to this effect, including a mechanism for appeal.<sup>37</sup> The CEC did not issue any procedural guidelines on this matter.

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<sup>35</sup> One debate on TV5 in Russian; five regional debates on TV in Latvian; one on LNT in Russian between prime ministerial candidates. These and other channels organized further debates independently to supplement their coverage.

<sup>36</sup> Paragraph 8 of the 1990 OSCE Copenhagen Document states that "the participating States consider that the presence of observers, both foreign and domestic, can enhance the electoral process...".

<sup>37</sup> Paragraph 18.4 of the 1991 OSCE Moscow Document states that "the participating States will endeavor to provide for judicial review of such regulations and decisions". Paragraph 5.10 of the 1990 OSCE Copenhagen Document requires everyone to "have an effective means of redress against administrative decisions".

*The law should be clarified and provide formal complaint mechanisms within the election administration.*

The right to judicial review is provided in two cases. CEC decisions on candidate registration may be appealed by submitters of candidate lists before the District Administrative Court within three days. The court decision is due within seven days and is final. CEC decisions on election results may be challenged also by submitters of candidate lists at the Supreme Court within three days, which has to bring a final decision within seven days. However, the election law does not provide for appeal of any other CEC decisions regarding organizational and technical aspects of the electoral process. Under the Law on Administrative Violations, however, appeals against decisions of administrative bodies may be filed with first instance administrative courts through regular administrative procedures, but with no specific election-related deadlines. Although administrative laws may take precedence in such cases, the absence of election-specific deadlines may undermine their timely remedy.<sup>38</sup>

*Consideration should be given to set specific time limits for appeals of election administration and court decisions on all aspects of the electoral process in order to ensure effective means of redress.*

The OSCE/ODIHR EAM was informed of only a small number of complaints during the electoral process. There were no complaints filed with the CEC or MECs. On election day, 33 complaints were recorded in electronic logbooks by PSCs with regard to technical irregularities on election day, all of which were addressed immediately.<sup>39</sup> The police received 56 claims of irregularities, that included breaches of campaign rules on election day and 31 allegations of vote buying; administrative procedures were initiated in 13 such cases.<sup>40</sup> On 24 October, Harmony Centre filed an appeal with the Supreme Court against the CEC decision on the results in Latgale alleging vote buying.<sup>41</sup> On 31 October, the court rejected this complaint on the grounds that possible irregularities would not have an impact on election results.

## **XV. ELECTION DAY**

In line with the OSCE/ODIHR's methodology, the EAM did not observe election day proceedings in a systematic or comprehensive manner. However, mission members visited a limited number of polling stations in the municipalities of Riga, Carnikava, Adazi and Garkalne. In polling stations visited by the OSCE/ODIHR EAM, the voting process was smooth and transparent, and the polling staff appeared to have a good understanding of procedures, including in managing the BALSIS system and the ballot scanning technology.

The layout and, at times, the size of the voting premises and design of the voting screens in polling stations visited by the OSCE/ODIHR EAM was such that the secrecy of the vote was often not fully protected, although no abuse of voter secrecy was noted by the EAM. In a number of cases voters did not use the voting booth due to the overcrowding or insufficient number of booths at certain times of the day. In several cases, overcrowding was observed, and some people were unable to cast a vote due to the absence of their passport or temporary voting card.

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<sup>38</sup> Paragraph 5.10 of the 1990 OSCE Copenhagen Document. See also section II.3.3.g of the 2006 Venice Commission Code of Good Practice in Electoral Matters, which recommends that “[t]ime-limits for lodging and deciding appeals must be short (three to five days for each at first instance).”

<sup>39</sup> These complaints were mostly related to the set-up of polling stations, including inadequate number of polling booth and voting screens.

<sup>40</sup> Nine such cases were in Riga and four in Kurzeme constituency.

<sup>41</sup> At the time of writing, the court decision was pending.

*Consistent with previous recommendations by the OSCE/ODIHR, measures should be taken to ensure the secrecy of the vote, including through voter information programmes and training of polling station officials. In addition, authorities should consider providing more and adequately designed voting booths and enlarging the number of polling stations, where necessary.*

Voters who could not go to a polling station for health reasons had the opportunity, along with their carers, to apply to vote from their location from 29 September until 4 October. According to the CEC, 22,499 voters used this opportunity. In addition, from 1 until 3 October, 30,383 voters made use of the possibility to cast their vote in advance and leave it for safe keeping in one of the 61 polling stations located in 39 municipalities. Voters who cast their vote early had the opportunity to change their vote on election day, of which 41 voters used this opportunity. The OSCE/ODIHR EAM interlocutors generally assessed the new possibility to vote in advance as a useful alternative voting mechanism, and a measure that could reduce overcrowding on election day.

Ballot scanning technology for vote counting was used at 600 polling stations. This, combined with the use of the BALSIS system for the aggregation of results online greatly facilitated the counting and tabulation process. Preliminary results were posted online, by municipality and polling station, in a timely manner ensuring transparency.<sup>42</sup>

## **XVI. RECOMMENDATIONS**

These recommendations, as contained throughout the text, are offered with a view to further enhance the conduct of elections in Latvia and to support efforts to bring them fully in line with OSCE commitments and other international standards for democratic elections. These recommendations should be read in conjunction with past OSCE/ODIHR recommendations that remain to be addressed. The OSCE/ODIHR stands ready to assist the authorities of Latvia to further improve the electoral process and to address the recommendations contained in this and previous reports.<sup>43</sup>

### **A. PRIORITY RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. In line with previous OSCE/ODIHR recommendations and with the OSCE commitments, which specifically protect the right of individual candidates to run for office, the legislation should be revised to enable candidates to run independently.
2. The blanket withdrawal of candidate rights of citizens who have committed a crime, irrespective of its gravity, is a disproportionate limitation and should be removed from the law.
3. In order to create the legal basis for the effective implementation of Paragraph 8 of the 1990 Copenhagen Document and to ensure full access to all stages of the election process to observers, consideration should be given to introducing an explicit provision for election observation, in particular setting out rights and responsibilities of observers as well as accreditation arrangements.

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<sup>42</sup> The preliminary election results were announced by the CEC at 16:00 hours on 5 October, with a turnout of 58.85 per cent.

<sup>43</sup> In paragraph 24 of the 1999 OSCE Istanbul Document, OSCE participating States committed themselves “to follow up promptly the ODIHR’s election assessment and recommendations.”

4. Consistent with previous recommendations by the OSCE/ODIHR, measures should be taken to ensure the secrecy of the vote, including through voter information programmes and training of polling station officials. In addition, authorities should consider providing more and adequately designed voting booths and enlarging the number of polling stations, where necessary.
5. In order to promote inclusive political participation, authorities should explore ways to increase the naturalization rate such as conducting campaigns to promote naturalization, publicizing opportunities for simplified naturalization under the revised Citizenship Law, and expanding the availability of free opportunities to learn Latvian. Civil society organizations should be supported in efforts to encourage non-citizens to complete the naturalization process.
6. Consideration should be given to decriminalize defamation, in line with international obligations on freedom of expression.
7. In order to further enhance transparency and public trust in the process, it is recommended that KNAB decisions, including those imposing sanctions, be published in a timely manner.

## **B. OTHER RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Legal Framework**

8. Consideration could be given to introducing temporary special legislative measures to promote women's political participation. Political parties could consider nominating a minimum number of candidates of each gender.
9. Notwithstanding the narrowed scope, further review of lustration provisions should be undertaken.

### **Election Administration**

10. Consideration could be given to providing a broader voter education in minority languages to reach out to national minority voters.
11. The transparency of the information system BALSIS would be enhanced by providing accredited observers with meaningful access to key stages of its setup and its operation, as well as documentation about the system.

### **Campaign Finance**

12. Considerations could be taken to reviewing the legislation to prevent multiple donations to individual parties within coalitions.
13. Consideration could be given to requiring all electoral contestants to provide reports on their campaign income and expenses before election day, according to a standardized template and within an acceptable time limit. These could be made public, in a timely manner, in order to improve transparency and accountability.
14. To enhance transparency and accountability, consideration could be given to requiring all electoral contestants to open dedicated bank accounts for campaign financing, through which all campaign transactions should be made.

## Media

15. Given the importance of media diversity to democracy, measures to limit concentration of media ownership, or promote internal pluralism of media, could be considered. In addition, Efforts could be made to introduce more stringent laws on transparency of media company ownership.
16. Consideration could be given to using a media monitoring methodology that provides a more detailed picture of campaign coverage. The release of interim monitoring results during the campaign and full results immediately after election day would render the council's work more effective and transparent.
17. Consideration could be given to reviewing the manner of selecting the members of the NEMC with a view to protecting the body from possible political interference.

## Complaints

18. The law should be clarified and provide formal complaint mechanisms within the election administration.
19. Consideration should be given to set specific time limits for appeals of election administration and court decisions on all aspects of the electoral process in order to ensure effective means of redress.

## ANNEX I: FINAL RESULTS<sup>44</sup>

| Political party or coalition  | Number of mandates | Percentage of valid votes |
|---|--------------------|---------------------------|
| 1. For the Development of Latvia  | 0                  | 0.89                      |
| 2. Sovereignty  | 0                  | 0.11                      |
| 3. Party Freedom. Free from Fear, Hate and Anger                              | 0                  | 0.19                      |
| 4. Unity Party  | 23                 | 21.87                     |
| 5. Political Party Growth   | 0                  | 0.17                      |
| 6. United for Latvia  | 0                  | 1.18                      |
| 7. National Alliance Everything For Latvia! - For Fatherland and Freedom/LNNK | 17                 | 16.61                     |
| 8. Alliance of Latvian Regions  | 8                  | 6.66                      |
| 9. The New Conservative Party   | 0                  | 0.7                       |
| 10. Latvian Russian Union   | 0                  | 1.58                      |
| 11. Harmony Centre, Social Democratic Party                                   | 24                 | 23                        |
| 12. The Union of Greens and Farmers   | 21                 | 19.53                     |
| 13. From Heart to Latvia  | 7                  | 6.85                      |

## ANNEX II: LIST OF CORE TEAM MEMBERS

|                             |                          |  |
|-----------------------------|--------------------------|--|
| Nikolai Lubomirov Vulchanov | Bulgaria                 | Head of Mission                          |
| Mercè Castells Vicente      | Spain                    | Deputy Head of Mission/<br>Legal Analyst |
| Oleksii Lychkovakh          | Ukraine                  | Election Analyst                         |
| Stéphane Mondon             | France                   | Political Analyst                        |
| Mary Boland                 | Ireland                  | Media Analyst                            |
| Jennifer Croft              | United States of America | National Minority Expert                 |

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<sup>44</sup> Official results are available on the CEC website: [http://sv2014.cvk.lv/index\\_rez.html?lang=1](http://sv2014.cvk.lv/index_rez.html?lang=1).

## ABOUT THE OSCE/ODIHR

The Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE/ODIHR) is the OSCE's principal institution to assist participating States "to ensure full respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, to abide by the rule of law, to promote principles of democracy and (...) to build, strengthen and protect democratic institutions, as well as promote tolerance throughout society" (1992 Helsinki Summit Document). This is referred to as the OSCE human dimension.

The OSCE/ODIHR, based in Warsaw (Poland) was created as the Office for Free Elections at the 1990 Paris Summit and started operating in May 1991. One year later, the name of the Office was changed to reflect an expanded mandate to include human rights and democratization. Today it employs over 130 staff.

The OSCE/ODIHR is the lead agency in Europe in the field of **election observation**. Every year, it co-ordinates and organizes the deployment of thousands of observers to assess whether elections in the OSCE region are conducted in line with OSCE commitments, other international obligations and standards for democratic elections and with national legislation. Its unique methodology provides an in-depth insight into the electoral process in its entirety. Through assistance projects, the OSCE/ODIHR helps participating States to improve their electoral framework.

The Office's **democratization** activities include: rule of law, legislative support, democratic governance, migration and freedom of movement, and gender equality. The OSCE/ODIHR implements a number of targeted assistance programs annually, seeking to develop democratic structures.

The OSCE/ODIHR also assists participating States' in fulfilling their obligations to promote and protect **human rights** and fundamental freedoms consistent with OSCE human dimension commitments. This is achieved by working with a variety of partners to foster collaboration, build capacity and provide expertise in thematic areas including human rights in the fight against terrorism, enhancing the human rights protection of trafficked persons, human rights education and training, human rights monitoring and reporting, and women's human rights and security.

Within the field of **tolerance** and **non-discrimination**, the OSCE/ODIHR provides support to the participating States in strengthening their response to hate crimes and incidents of racism, xenophobia, anti-Semitism and other forms of intolerance. The OSCE/ODIHR's activities related to tolerance and non-discrimination are focused on the following areas: legislation; law enforcement training; monitoring, reporting on, and following up on responses to hate-motivated crimes and incidents; as well as educational activities to promote tolerance, respect, and mutual understanding.

The OSCE/ODIHR provides advice to participating States on their policies on **Roma and Sinti**. It promotes capacity-building and networking among Roma and Sinti communities, and encourages the participation of Roma and Sinti representatives in policy-making bodies.

All OSCE/ODIHR activities are carried out in close co-ordination and co-operation with OSCE participating States, OSCE institutions and field operations, as well as with other international organizations.

More information is available on the ODIHR website ([www.osce.org/odihr](http://www.osce.org/odihr)).