



Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights

**REPUBLIC OF LATVIA**  
**PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS**  
**7 October 2006**

**OSCE/ODIHR NEEDS ASSESSMENT MISSION REPORT**

**3 – 5 August 2006**



Warsaw  
5 September 2006

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**REPUBLIC OF LATVIA**  
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**OSCE/ODIHR Needs Assessment Mission Report**

**I. INTRODUCTION**

Following an invitation from the Republic of Latvia to the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) to observe the 7 October 2006 elections to the Saeima (Parliament) in Latvia, the OSCE/ODIHR undertook a Needs Assessment Mission (NAM) during 3 to 5 August 2006. The purpose of the OSCE/ODIHR NAM was to assess the pre-electoral environment and the preparations for the election, and to make recommendations regarding a potential OSCE/ODIHR activity in relation to the upcoming elections.

The Needs Assessment Mission was composed of Ambassador Boris Frlec and Ambassador Stephen Nash (OSCE/ODIHR Consultants), Mr. Jonathan Stonestreet (OSCE/ODIHR Election Adviser), and Mr. Andreas Baker (Press and Programme Officer, OSCE Parliamentary Assembly).

The OSCE/ODIHR would like to thank the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia for its assistance and cooperation in organising the Needs Assessment Mission, and the Embassy of Belgium for their support to the mission. The OSCE/ODIHR would also like to thank all those who took the time to meet with the NAM. The list of meetings is attached to this report.

**II. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The 7 October election to the Saeima will be the fifth such election since the restoration of independence on 18 November 1991. The Saeima is a unicameral Parliament, composed of 100 seats. Members are elected from five multi-seat constituencies for four-year terms through a proportional list system.

The OSCE/ODIHR Final Report from the 2002 Saeima election stated that the election was “well administered and overall conducted in accordance with OSCE commitments and international standards for democratic elections.” The report also noted some issues of concern, in particular, provisions of the law that limit candidacy rights based on past political party and security service affiliations, as well as the substantial proportion of the population who are “non-citizens” and who as such do not have the right to vote in national or municipal elections. The Final Report expressed hope that “Latvia can also address some aspects of its election process that could now be consigned to its past.”<sup>1</sup>

The Needs Assessment Mission found that there is general confidence among political parties and civil society in the overall election administration process in Latvia, and that, despite some vote buying incidents during the 2005 municipal elections, there is confidence that the election day procedures on 7 October will be conducted in a transparent and professional manner. However, the NAM also found that only limited steps have been taken with respect to the recommendations made in the OSCE/ODIHR Final Report from 2002.

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<sup>1</sup> OSCE/ODIHR Final Report from the 5 October 2002 Saeima Elections in the Republic of Latvia, 20 November 2002, p.1. [www.osce.org/odihr-elections/14489.html](http://www.osce.org/odihr-elections/14489.html)

Since the 2002 elections, strict limits on campaign spending have been instituted, and the capacity of the Anti-Corruption Bureau to monitor adherence to the legislation has apparently increased, although some interlocutors questioned its effectiveness. A provision of the Saeima Election Law that previously restricted voting rights for persons in custody, but not convicted of a crime, is no longer in force. Additional positive aspects of the process include independent oversight of the electronic media during the campaign period and the transparency of the election day process through political party observers and openness to the participation of international and domestic non-partisan observers.

Several interlocutors expressed concerns to the NAM, some of which reflected aspects of the process previously noted in the OSCE/ODIHR Final Report on the 5 October 2002 Saeima elections, and which were the subject of recommendations for further improvement of the election process. These issues include 1) legal restrictions on the ability of the Central Election Commission and mass media to provide information on the election process in minority languages; 2) provisions in the Saeima Election Law that restrict candidacy based on past political affiliation or employment record, although the European Court of Human Rights has upheld some of these legal provisions on a temporary basis; 3) the use of “third-party” and “hidden” advertising in the media in an attempt to circumvent spending limits; and 4) the composition of election commissions at lower levels in some areas of the country.

In particular, concerns were also expressed regarding the high number of “non-citizens,” who do not have the right to participate in elections in Latvia until they go through a naturalization process. Although the number of non-citizens who have been naturalised has significantly increased since 2002, some 18 per cent of the population remain stateless “non-citizens.”<sup>2</sup> While the Latvian authorities and other interlocutors stated that the naturalization process affords most non-citizens the possibility to obtain citizenship, some interlocutors stated that the category of non-citizens is too broadly defined and thereby limits the voting rights of a substantial number of people. Non-citizens have not been extended the right to vote in municipal elections, although there was a recommendation in the OSCE/ODIHR 2002 Final Report that encouraged a full and public discussion regarding this issue, as well as recommendations from the Council of Europe and other organizations. Since Latvia’s accession to the European Union, European Union citizens resident in Latvia have the right to vote in municipal elections.

As a result of issues raised during the NAM, issues considered in previous OSCE/ODIHR reports on the election process in Latvia, and the overall confidence expressed in the actual election day proceedings, the OSCE/ODIHR would recommend undertaking a Limited Election Observation Mission to the forthcoming Saeima elections for a three week period prior to the election. The OSCE/ODIHR requests that the OSCE participating States second ten (10) long-term observers to be deployed in all five constituencies of Latvia. In accordance with standard practice, a Limited Election Observation Mission does not entail comprehensive or systematic election day observation at polling station level.

### III. BACKGROUND

The 9<sup>th</sup> Saeima election on 7 October will be the fifth such election since the restoration of independence on 18 November 1991. The Saeima is a unicameral Parliament, composed of 100 seats. Members are elected from five multi-seat constituencies for four-year terms

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<sup>2</sup> Permanent residents of Latvia whose status was defined by the 1995 Law on the Status of Citizens of the Former USSR.

through a proportional open list system. Political parties and associations of political parties may nominate candidate lists for any and all constituencies, with candidates permitted to run in more than one constituency for the same list. There is a five per cent threshold for obtaining representation in parliament.

During the NAM, most interlocutors highlighted the continuing stability of the political landscape in Latvia. In previous years, new political parties of significant size had appeared shortly before the elections; this does not seem to be the case for the 2006 elections. The Central Election Commission received 19 candidate list submissions as of the 8 August deadline.

## IV. FINDINGS

### A. LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORK

The Saeima election will be conducted within the framework of several applicable laws, including the Saeima Election Law, the Law on the Central Election Commission, the Law on City, District, County, and Municipality Election Commissions, the Law on Financing Political Organizations (Parties), Law on Campaigning Before Saeima Elections, as well as legislation regulating citizenship, language, lustration and other matters. The legal framework has previously been assessed as containing “the overall elements necessary for the conduct of a democratic election process,” although certain aspects “remain of outstanding concern.”<sup>3</sup> Since that time, one of these concerns has been addressed through the elimination of Article 2.2 of the Saeima Election Law, which had previously made suspects in custody (but not convicted of a crime) ineligible to vote. The paragraph was declared null and void by a decision of the Constitutional Court on 5 March 2003.

### B. CANDIDACY REQUIREMENTS

The Saeima Election Law still retains restrictions on the right to be elected based on former political party affiliation or employment record (Articles 5 and 13). Articles 5.5 and 5.6 of the Saeima Election Law stipulate that persons cannot be included in candidate lists if they “belong or have belonged to the salaried staff of the USSR, Latvian SSR or another country’s state security, intelligence or counterintelligence services,” or if they took part in support of the Communist Party and related structures after 13 January 1991. These provisions were challenged in separate court cases related to the 2002 elections and were upheld in the Constitutional Court with reservations.<sup>4</sup>

One of these cases, regarding restrictions on candidacy based on activity in the Communist Party after 13 January 1991, was taken to the European Court of Human Rights (*Zdanoka vs. Latvia*). On 16 March 2006, the Grand Chamber of the Court found for Latvia, determining that the legislative and judicial authorities of Latvia should be allowed sufficient latitude in determining the need for provisions such as those in Article 5.6, provided that the provisions are not arbitrary or disproportionate. However, the ruling stated that the Latvian Parliament must continually review the necessity for these restrictions with a view to their early elimination.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> OSCE/ODIHR Final Report from the 5 October 2002 Saeima Elections in the Republic of Latvia, 20 November 2002, p.3. [www.osce.org/odihr-elections/14489.html](http://www.osce.org/odihr-elections/14489.html)

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, p. 5.

<sup>5</sup> European Court of Human Rights (Grand Chamber), Case of Zdanoka vs. Latvia (Application Number 58278/00), Judgment, 16 March 2006. Available at:

Article 15 requires that the names of candidates who “allegedly collaborated with the USSR, the Latvian SSR or another country’s state security, intelligence or counterintelligence services”, be published by the CEC at least 20 days before the election. Articles of the Election Law related to collaboration with former security services were expected to become moribund with the expiration in 2004 of relevant provisions in the 1994 “Law On Storage and use of the Documents of Former KGB and on Establishment of the Fact of Collaboration with the KGB.” However, these provisions were renewed by the Saeima for an additional 10 year period.

Since the 2002 elections, Latvia has joined the European Union and has as a result adopted a separate law for European Parliament elections which does not include undue restrictions on candidacy based on past political affiliation or employment record.

A separate outstanding concern is that, contrary to Article 7.5 of the 1990 OSCE Copenhagen Commitments, the Saeima Election Law does not provide for the possibility for individuals to run as candidates independently from political parties, although individuals may form political parties that could then nominate only one candidate.

#### **C. ELECTION ADMINISTRATION**

The Central Election Commission (CEC) is composed of a Chairperson and seven members elected by the Parliament and one judge from the Supreme Court. All persons with whom the NAM met expressed their confidence in the Central Election Commission and its Chairman.

The election administration involves political party representatives at all levels, which increases the transparency of the electoral process. One political party stated that election administration bodies at lower levels include a disproportionate number of persons who are employed by official bodies and who may therefore be subject to pressure from local officials. All other political parties referred to the strong role of political party observers in controlling the process of voting, counting and reporting of results and expressed confidence in the overall administration of the elections. The CEC noted that parties should take greater initiative in nominating their members to work in polling station commissions.

#### **D. VOTER REGISTER**

The Republic of Latvia does not maintain a voter registration system for Saeima elections, although a voter register does exist for European Parliament elections and for local elections. Eligible citizens can vote with a passport at any polling station in any constituencies, and the polling station commission stamps the passport in order to prevent multiple voting. The ODIHR has commented on this unique feature of the election process in Latvia in the past.<sup>6</sup>

The Chairman of the CEC expressed confidence in the voter register used for other elections, stating that only a political decision would be necessary in order to implement the system for Saeima elections. Political parties informed the NAM that use of a voter register for the Saeima elections had been considered but had not been adopted due to fears that it would

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<http://cmiskp.echr.coe.int/tkp197/view.asp?item=5&portal=hbkm&action=html&highlight=LATVIA&sessionid=8020855&skin=hudoc-en>

<sup>6</sup> OSCE/ODIHR Final Report from the 5 October 2002 Saeima Elections in the Republic of Latvia, 20 November 2002, pp. 9 - 10 [www.osce.org/odihr-elections/14489.html](http://www.osce.org/odihr-elections/14489.html)

decrease voter participation. They cited low turnout in European Parliament elections and in the 2005 local elections.

#### E. CAMPAIGN, CAMPAIGN FINANCING, AND MEDIA

No concerns were raised during the NAM regarding the ability of political parties and candidates to campaign freely and without interference. However, some political parties and civil society groups expressed concern about the potential abuse of administrative resources by local and other authorities<sup>7</sup> and about other potential efforts to circumvent campaign finance limits, as political parties look for ways to increase their media exposure and campaign visibility in the pre-election period.

The Law on Political Party Financing was amended in December 2004 to limit campaign spending for the nine-month period prior to election day to 20 *santims* per voter (approximately 0.29 Euro). This amendment reflected a compromise, with some political parties stating that the maximum amount of spending is too low. Campaign spending is now monitored by the Anti-Corruption Bureau, which has taken over this role from the State Revenue Service. The Anti-Corruption Bureau is seen by many interlocutors as still lacking resources but as developing its capacity to regulate campaign financing.

The new spending limits have given rise to concerns by some regarding so-called “third-party” advertising. This refers to advertisements or programs which are not directly sponsored or paid for by a political party but which present a message designed to serve the interests of one party or group of parties. In past elections, there have been concerns regarding “hidden advertising,” which refers to information in the media which has not been denoted as political advertising as required by law (for example, paid editorial coverage or candidates using their presence on programs not related to politics to convey a political message). One political party alleged that some television stations had in previous elections shown bias in the rates charged for campaign advertising.

The National Broadcasting Council monitors electronic media for adherence to media regulations, including ensuring that advertising rates are equal for all election contestants, that requirements for free campaign advertising are adhered to, and that there is no “hidden” advertising. The National Broadcasting Council is currently considering a case of alleged “third party” advertising to determine whether it contravenes legal provisions. In addition, civil society groups plan to conduct media monitoring regarding hidden and third party advertising during the upcoming campaign.

Members of the Council are politically appointed, but the Council is generally regarded as independent due to the political balance achieved in its composition. However, there was some concern expressed during the NAM that members of the Council have on occasion informally overstepped their remit and exerted pressure on editorial decisions of media outlets. The Council expressed concern at the lack of transparency in the ownership of private television stations.

It should be noted that the NAM was assured by all representatives of the media that anyone in Latvia who wants to convey their political message has a possibility to do so in the mass media. The public television channel LTV1 plans to host a series of 11 live debates among political parties competing in the elections. In addition, the channel will present a 30 minute program on each of the major parties, and smaller parties will be combined into 30 minute

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<sup>7</sup> See, for example, Transparency International Latvia (Delna), “Observing the Misuse of Administrative Resources in Advance of the 2005 Local Government Election.” [www.delna.lv/eng/](http://www.delna.lv/eng/)

programs. For the election period, a “Council of Public Observers” is being created to monitor the work of public television, in addition to the monitoring of the National Broadcasting Council, internal monitoring, and civil society monitoring.

Although electronic media cannot publish polls on election day, there is no election silence period. The Chairman of the CEC noted that the lack of a campaign silence period has previously been the subject of complaints from citizens.

#### **F. VOTER INFORMATION**

No changes have been made since 2002 regarding the issue of providing voter education information in languages other than Latvian. The CEC informed the NAM that it had planned to provide voter education materials in the Russian language in the 2005 local elections but had been prevented from doing so by the State Language Inspectorate. This body had informed the CEC that it must strictly adhere to provisions of the Law on the Official Language of Latvia, which requires the use of Latvian language in official communication.

Although Latvian is the State language, it is nevertheless a fact that a substantial number of citizens communicate and have better comprehension in the Russian language, as well as in other languages. In order to ensure all citizens are able to understand the election process, the OSCE/ODIHR recommended in the Final Report on the 2002 Saeima elections that voter information be provided for sizeable minority linguistic communities.

#### **G. ELECTION OBSERVERS**

The Saeima Election Law permits political party representatives, media representatives, and “persons authorized” by election commissions to be accredited as observers. Most political party representatives stated that the presence of their observers ensured the transparency of the process and increased their confidence in the process. Although the law is not detailed in this respect, the Chairman of the Central Election Commission assured the NAM that international observers would be accredited and that there are no obstacles to accreditation of domestic observers. However, there do not appear to be any civil society organizations active in Latvia that have sought to observe under the legislation.

#### **H. VOTING PROCESS**

Under the Latvian voting system, each voter is given a set of ballot papers, each of which contains the names of all the candidates on a single party’s list in that constituency. To vote, a voter selects one party list ballot and inserts it in a secrecy envelope which has been stamped with the number of the polling station. The voter has the option of leaving the ballot paper unaltered, to express a preference for certain candidates by placing “+” marks next to their names, or to cross out the names of candidates they reject. The voter deposits the sealed secrecy envelope in the ballot box. The unused ballot papers are not considered sensitive materials and may be removed from the polling station (the stamped envelopes are sensitive materials and are accounted for throughout the process).

While the Saeima Election Law requires that voters vote in privacy, the CEC acknowledged that group or family voting continues to be a problem in some areas of the country. Continued efforts to ensure the secrecy of the vote was the subject of a previous OSCE/ODIHR recommendation.<sup>8</sup> The CEC informed the NAM that emphasis is being placed on this topic

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<sup>8</sup> OSCE/ODIHR Final Report from the 5 October 2002 Saeima Elections in the Republic of Latvia, 20 November 2002. [www.osce.org/odihr-elections/14489.html](http://www.osce.org/odihr-elections/14489.html)

during the training of polling station chairpersons and secretaries and that the issue is the subject of voter education information.

The Saeima Election Law provides for mobile voting for those voters who cannot come to a polling station for health reasons and for their caregivers. The law also provides for the participation of voters abroad through voting by mail or at approximately 50 polling stations established outside Latvia. As voters are permitted to vote at any polling station in Latvia, the system eliminates the need for voting by mail within Latvia itself.

#### **I. COUNTING AND REPORTING OF RESULTS**

Counting is conducted in two phases. First, the secrecy envelopes are accounted for, and votes for party lists are counted and reported. Materials are then sealed, and the polling station commission reconvenes to count voter preferences within party lists the next day. The procedures for counting appear to be well-defined. One political party claimed that the counting method opens the possibility for manipulation of the ballots during the overnight break between the two parts of the process but acknowledged that there was no evidence that manipulation had actually occurred. No other interlocutors expressed concern about the counting process.

Provisional results are reported electronically and are posted on the CEC website. The CEC Chairman acknowledged that observers are not always able to obtain a copy of the protocol, although protocols must be publicly posted. The CEC will additionally provide pre-printed forms for observers to record the results. The final results are tabulated through a double entry system, which has previously been assessed as an effective audit tool that promotes accurate reporting of the final certified results.<sup>9</sup>

#### **J. MARCH 2005 MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS**

The NAM was informed that the 12 March 2005 municipal elections experienced some isolated, yet serious irregularities in regard to vote buying. These cases were subsequently dealt with in the courts. The results of the election in Rezekne were annulled by the Administrative District Court, and a new election was held in August 2005. The Administrative District Court also annulled the elections in Jurmala, but this decision was overturned by the Administrative Regional Court, which found that there was insufficient evidence regarding the extent of the vote buying. In a third case, in Limbazu district, a criminal case was initiated regarding the buying of votes from five persons, and the election results were not challenged.<sup>10</sup>

### **V. NATURALISATION PROCESS**

According to the Citizenship Law of Latvia, only persons who were citizens before 17 June 1940, and their descendants, received automatic citizenship upon the re-establishment of independence in 1991. Other permanent residents of Latvia – in the vast majority immigrants from Russia during the period of the former Soviet Union and their descendants – must go through a naturalisation process to obtain citizenship. A subsequent amendment permits

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<sup>9</sup> OSCE/ODIHR Final Report from the 5 October 2002 Saeima Elections in the Republic of Latvia, 20 November 2002. [www.osce.org/odihr-elections/14489.html](http://www.osce.org/odihr-elections/14489.html)

<sup>10</sup> “Human Rights in the OSCE Region: Europe, Central Asia and North America, Report 2006 (Events of 2005),” International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights. Latvia chapter by the Latvian Centre for Human Rights. [www.ihf-hr.org/documents/doc\\_summary.php?sec\\_id=3&d\\_id=4255](http://www.ihf-hr.org/documents/doc_summary.php?sec_id=3&d_id=4255)

children of non-citizens born after 21 August 1991 to obtain citizenship without going through the naturalization process if their parents so choose.

Most non-citizens who have lived in Latvia for five years or more have the right to become citizens upon the completion of the naturalisation process, which includes a proficiency exam in the Latvian language, a test on historical and constitutional facts, and an oath of allegiance. The naturalisation procedure is clearly defined and appears to function without any specific bureaucratic hurdles.

Since the 2002 Saeima elections, the naturalisation process has continued to function, with an increase in numbers related to accession to the European Union. According to the Naturalisation Board, the number of non-citizens who have been naturalised since the 2002 parliamentary election has increased by approximately 60,000 people (half the overall total of naturalised citizens).

However, there are still approximately 403,000 non-citizens resident in Latvia (about 18 per cent of the total population), with over 270,000 of these of voting age. As only Latvian citizens can vote or be candidates in Saeima elections in Latvia, a significant proportion of the resident population is effectively disenfranchised.

The Naturalisation Board reported that despite increases in the number of persons being naturalised per year in 2004 and 2005, it was expected that this figure would decrease in 2006. The Naturalisation Board's explanation for the expected decrease in the rate of naturalisation was that many non-citizens who consider it important to seek Latvian citizenship have already gone through the process, leaving primarily those who do not want to obtain Latvian citizenship. The Naturalisation Board noted that there have been some complaints from potential candidates that they are not being naturalised in time for the elections.

While all interlocutors agreed that the naturalisation process itself is conducted fairly by the Naturalisation Board, several interlocutors indicated that they disagreed with the broad scope of the category of those who must go through the naturalisation process in order to obtain citizenship.<sup>11</sup> Another claim expressed to the NAM was that the language requirement for naturalisation is too burdensome for elderly persons.

Many other interlocutors, including the Latvian authorities, noted that the naturalization process is well-established and functioning smoothly, and stated that the requirements for citizenship are not onerous and are necessary to ensure that all citizens are integrated into Latvia. These interlocutors indicated that the relatively large number of non-citizens is due to the fact that many people in this category do not wish to become Latvian citizens.

On 15 August 2006, after the conclusion of the NAM, new regulations were promulgated which make the naturalization process more restrictive for those applying after this date. The regulations require a higher level of Latvian language ability in order to pass the language exam and limit the number of times an applicant can take exams before having to reapply.

The OSCE/ODIHR recommended after the 2002 Saeima elections that there be a full and public discussion on voting rights for non-citizens in municipal elections as a step toward eliminating the democratic deficit created by the fact that a substantial portion of the

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<sup>11</sup> These interlocutors objected, for example, to the fact that those persons who were born in Latvia prior to 21 August 1991 but who are not descendants of persons who were Latvian citizens prior to 17 June 1940, are obliged to go through the naturalisation process.

population has no voting rights at national or municipal level. Although the Council of Europe and the Council of the Baltic Sea States have previously urged Latvia to grant voting rights to resident non-citizens for municipal elections, these persons have not been granted voting rights. Some government interlocutors told the NAM that giving non-citizens the right to vote in municipal elections would remove an incentive for naturalisation.

## **VI. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

There were a variety of opinions expressed to the OSCE/ODIHR NAM regarding a potential observation activity with regard to the upcoming 7 October 2006 elections to the Saeima (Parliament). On the basis of the findings described above, the OSCE/ODIHR recommends the establishment of a Limited Election Observation Mission for the parliamentary election for a period of three weeks prior to election day, in accordance with the invitation issued by the Republic of Latvia to the OSCE/ODIHR on 18 July 2006.

In order to follow the issues identified in this report as well as any other significant election-related issues that may arise during the course of the parliamentary elections, the OSCE/ODIHR requests that the OSCE participating States second ten (10) long-term observers to be deployed in all five constituencies of Latvia. However, given the overall confidence expressed in the election day proceedings by political parties and civil society, and past OSCE/ODIHR findings, short-term observers are not considered necessary in the context of comprehensive or systematic election day observation.

## **ANNEX 1. LIST OF MEETINGS**

### **Ministry of Foreign Affairs**

Ms Aiga Liepiņa, Director of Department for International Organizations and Human Rights

Mr. Valērijs Romanovskis, Head of the Human Rights Division

Mr. Emīls Plakšins, Office of the Government's Representative before International Human Rights Organisations

### **Office of the President**

Mr Jānis Mažeiks, Adviser to the President on Foreign Affairs

### **Naturalisation Board**

Mrs Eiženija Aldermane, Head of the Naturalisation Board

### **Political Parties**

Mr. Maris Grīnblats, MP (For Fatherland and Freedom/LNNK)

Mr. Guntis Bērziņš, MP (New Era)

Mr. Māris Krastiņš, MP (People's Party)

Mr. Oskars Kastēns MP (Latvia's First Party)

Mr. Indulis Emsis, MP (Green and Farmers' Union)

Mr. Jakovs Pliners, MP (For Human Rights in a United Latvia)

Mr. Nikolajs Kabanovs, MP (For Human Rights in a United Latvia)

Mr. Juris Sokolovskis, MP (For Human Rights in a United Latvia)

Mr. Andrejs Klementjevs, MP (Harmony Centre)

### **Election Administration**

Mr. Arnis Cimdars, Chairman of the Central Election Commission

### **Media**

Ms. Selga Laizāne, Director of LTV1

Mr. Andris Mellakauls, Member of the National Broadcasting Council

Ms. Ksenija Zagorovska, Editor-in-Chief of "Chas" (newspaper)

Ms. Sarmite Elerte, Editor-in-Chief of "Diena" (newspaper)

## **Non-Governmental Organisations**

Ms. Ilze Brands Kehris, Director of the Latvian Centre for Human Rights

## **International Community**

*Meeting hosted by Ambassador Christian Verdonck, Belgium. Invitation accepted by -*

Ambassador Claire Poulin	Canada
Ambassador Emilio Lorenzo Serra	Spain
Ambassador Maciej Klimczak	Poland
Ambassador Robert Schuddeboom	The Netherlands
Ambassador Eberhard Schuppius	Germany
Ambassador Joao Niza Pinheiro	Portugal
Ambassador Viktor Kalyuzhny	Russian Federation
Ambassador Goran Hakansson	Sweden
Ambassador Anne Bauty	Switzerland
Ambassador Arnold De Fine Skibsted	Denmark
Ambassador Wernfried Koffler	Austria
Ambassador Duray Polat	Turkey
Ambassador Nils Olav Stava	Norway
Michel Tarran	France
Donal Kenneally	Ireland
Urve Nou	Estonia
Les Johnston	United States of America
Bohumil Dolejsi	Czech Republic
Valery Dougan	Belarus
Pierangelo Cammarota	Italy
Oleksandr Yurov	Ukraine
Mikko Kivikoski	Finland

The NAM also met separately with Ambassador Viktor Kalyuzhny of the Russian Federation.

## ABOUT THE OSCE/ODIHR

The Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (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 Document).

The 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 100 staff.

The ODIHR is the lead agency in Europe in the field of **election observation**. It co-ordinates and organizes the deployment of thousands of observers every year to assess whether elections in the OSCE area are in line with national legislation and international standards. Its unique methodology provides an in-depth insight into all elements of an electoral process. Through assistance projects, the ODIHR helps participating States to improve their electoral framework.

The Office's **democratization** activities include the following thematic areas: rule of law, legislative support, democratic governance, migration and freedom of movement, and gender equality. The ODIHR implements a number of targeted assistance programmes annually, seeking both to facilitate and enhance State compliance with OSCE commitments and to develop democratic structures.

The ODIHR monitors participating States' compliance with OSCE human dimension commitments, and assists with improving the protection of **human rights**. It also organizes several meetings every year to review the implementation of OSCE human dimension commitments by participating States.

Within the field of **tolerance** and **non-discrimination**, the ODIHR provides support to the participating States in implementing their OSCE commitments and in strengthening their response to hate crimes and incidents of racism, xenophobia, anti-Semitism and other forms of intolerance. The 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 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. The Office also acts as a clearing-house for the exchange of information on Roma and Sinti issues among national and international actors.

All 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)).