



Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights

THE REPUBLIC OF LATVIA

EARLY PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS 17 SEPTEMBER 2011

OSCE/ODIHR Limited Election Observation Mission Final Report



**Warsaw
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I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The 17 September early parliamentary elections took place in a democratic and pluralistic environment, characterized by the rule of law, respect of fundamental freedoms, functioning democratic institutions and the existence of a genuine choice between parties offering different political platforms. These were the first early elections of the *Saeima* (parliament) since the foundation of the Republic of Latvia in 1918. The elections took place in the context of a long economical and internal political crisis that resulted in the parliament's dissolution less than ten months after its election.

Thirteen lists of political parties and alliances competed for the 100-seat *Saeima*. The political landscape continued to be generally divided along ethnic and linguistic lines. While some political parties made efforts to reach out to both main linguistic communities, parties were still broadly perceived as representing either Latvian speakers or the country's considerable Russian-speaking population, many of whom are non-citizens.¹

The diversity of the running parties and alliances offered a broad spectrum of political views. Key contenders included both governing alliances – 'Unity' and the 'Union of Greens and Farmers' (running separately), the 'Concord Centre', seen as representing mainly Russian language minority, and the 'Zatlers' Reform Party' (ZRP), a new party established by the previous president of Latvia.

Electoral contenders were able to carry out their activities freely; the campaign was rather low-key and non-confrontational, only gaining a higher level of visibility during its last week. The effects of the economic crisis, a shorter campaign period, and cuts in the spending limits had a visible impact on the campaign.

The legal framework generally provided an adequate basis for the conduct of democratic elections, but it could benefit from further improvements. Limited ballot access for convicted people whose sentences have not yet been expunged, and for those subject to lustration provisions, remains a challenge. In addition, Latvian legislation still does not allow candidates to run independently.

The well-developed regulations ensure transparency of campaign finance; they were generally followed by parties and candidates. There were fewer violations than in previous years and those were pursued promptly.

While citizenship is recognized as an admissible restriction to suffrage, it remains a challenge that a considerable number of non-citizens are not able to vote. Due to the slow rate of naturalization, including among many individuals who were born in Latvia, a significant part of the population continues to face barriers to political participation. Voter education materials were only available in

¹ References to Latvian and Russian speakers are used with regard to those whose first language is either Latvian or Russian.

Latvian, potentially disadvantaging voters with low Latvian proficiency. An opportunity to send a positive message of inclusion of those whose first language is not Latvian was thus missed.

Overall, the Central Election Commission (CEC) and Municipal Election Councils (MECs) administered these early elections in a professional manner, overcoming substantial time constraints. The official CEC website provided the public with regular updates. CEC members and staff were proactive in sharing information with the OSCE/ODIHR Limited Election Observation Mission (LEOM). CEC sessions were held collegially and were open to international and domestic observers from civil society, and the media. The majority of the OSCE/ODIHR LEOM's interlocutors expressed confidence in the impartiality and professionalism of the election administration.

The Latvian mass media are free to disseminate information and views, and they provide the public with a range of different viewpoints. A number of political parties met by the OSCE/ODIHR LEOM expressed lack of trust in the fairness and objectivity of the media. The perceived affiliation of certain broadcasters and newspapers with influential businessmen and politicians, as well as the reported practice of unrecorded payments or provision of other benefits by politicians in return for media coverage, remains a concern.

International and domestic observers from civil society organizations were accredited by the CEC to follow election day proceedings across the country. Although the legislation remains imprecise on accreditation procedures and the rights of election observers, the OSCE/ODIHR LEOM received no reports of observers experiencing problems with access to polling stations.

Voting in the limited number of polling stations visited by the OSCE/ODIHR LEOM proceeded in an orderly manner. Election commissions followed procedures and fulfilled their duties in a professional manner. However, the layout of polling stations and occasional overcrowding did not always ensure the secrecy of the vote. The vote count and result aggregation were orderly and transparent, though the count was protracted in some polling stations due to large numbers of ballots cast.

There were 21 women in the outgoing parliament and 21 women were elected in 2011. None of the political parties or alliances met by the OSCE/ODIHR LEOM reported any internal mechanisms to promote gender equality in their lists. Out of 1,092 candidates, 331 were women (30.3 per cent). This represented a slight increase compared to the 28.6 per cent (353 out of 1,235 candidates) who contested the parliamentary elections in 2010.

II. INTRODUCTION AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Following an invitation from the Permanent Mission of the Republic of Latvia to the OSCE, the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) deployed a Limited Election Observation Mission for the 17 September early parliamentary elections. The OSCE/ODIHR LEOM was headed by Konrad Olszewski, and consisted of nine experts in Riga and six long-term observers deployed to three regional centres. The OSCE/ODIHR LEOM was drawn from 13 OSCE participating states.

In accordance with OSCE/ODIHR's methodology for LEOMs, the mission did not include short-term observers and did not conduct a comprehensive and systematic observation of election-day proceedings; However, the LEOM visited a limited number of polling stations and followed the tabulation of results in some districts.

The elections were assessed for their compliance with OSCE commitments and other international standards for democratic elections, as well as with Latvian legislation. This final report follows a Statement of Preliminary Findings and Conclusions that was released at a press conference in Riga on 18 September.² The statement reflected that elections "took place in a democratic and pluralistic environment, characterized by the rule of law, respect of fundamental freedoms, functioning democratic institutions and the existence of a genuine choice between parties offering different political platforms."

The OSCE/ODIHR LEOM wishes to thank the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Central Election Commission, as well as other national and local state institutions, electoral authorities, candidates, political parties and civil society organizations for their co-operation.

III. POLITICAL BACKGROUND

The 17 September elections were held to elect the 11th *Saeima* (parliament). These were the first early parliamentary elections since the foundation of the Republic of Latvia in 1918. They took place in context of an economic crisis and as a consequence of the political crisis that resulted in the parliament's dissolution, less than ten months after its election. In the 2 October 2010 elections, the largest number of seats (33) was won by the 'Unity' alliance, which formed a government with the 'Union of Greens and Farmers' (22 seats). The 'Concord Centre' won 29 seats and became the biggest opposition alliance. The 'National Alliance' and 'For a Good Latvia' won 8 seats each.

In May 2011, as part of a criminal investigation involving prominent politicians, the Corruption Prevention and Combating Bureau (KNAB) asked the parliament to strip one of its members of his parliamentary immunity in order to search his house. On 26 May, the parliament voted against this motion. President Valdis Zatlers, whose term was due to end on 7 July, decided to dissolve the parliament. Under the Constitution, when a president calls for dismissal of the parliament, a national referendum must be held on the issue.³ In the 23 July referendum, the voters overwhelmingly supported the dissolution of the parliament.⁴

In the meantime, on 2 June, the parliament elected Mr. Andris Berzins as the new President; he took office on 8 July. Further significant changes in the political landscape occurred during the summer of 2011. The former President Zatlers created his own party – the 'Zatlers' Reform Party'. The 'People's Party' was dissolved by its congress and 'First Party-Latvia's Way' was renamed as 'Slesers' Reform Party', after its leader. Most of the parties that registered for these elections had also run in 2010. In addition, 88 of the 100 elected deputies stood again.

² See <http://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/82574>.

³ If voters support the president, parliament is dissolved and new elections are scheduled within two months. If voters do not approve the motion, the president must step down.

⁴ 94.3 per cent of voters voted to dissolve the parliament, 5.4 per cent were against. The turnout was 44.7 per cent.

IV. LEGAL FRAMEWORK AND ELECTORAL SYSTEM

A. LEGAL FRAMEWORK

The parliamentary elections are primarily regulated by the Constitution and the *Saeima* Election Law. Other relevant legislation includes the Law on the Central Election Commission, the Law on the Financing of Political Organizations, the Law on the Pre-electoral Campaign, and the Law on the City, District, County and *Pegasts* Election Commissions, and Polling Station Commissions.⁵ The legal framework is supplemented by instructions of the Central Election Commission (CEC).

The legal framework generally provided an adequate basis for the conduct of democratic elections, but it could benefit from further improvements. Limited ballot access for convicted people whose sentences have not yet been expunged, and for those subject to lustration provisions, remains a challenge.

Legislation was amended on 16 June and 14 July to adapt to some specific conditions for early elections, particularly to adjust the duration of the campaign and postal voting deadlines. In view of the shorter campaign period, the spending limit was cut by half. An earlier amendment, introduced on 3 March 2011, allowed judges to run in the elections without having to resign unless elected.

All Latvian citizens aged 18 or older, with the exception of those declared incompetent by a final court decision, are eligible to vote. From the age of 21, citizens are allowed to stand as parliamentary candidates. A candidate can run only on a party list and in no more than one constituency. The legislation does not allow for individual independent candidates.⁶

Although Latvian electoral legislation contains no provisions on disabled voters' accessibility, several measures have been taken by the CEC to accommodate such voters.⁷ The OSCE/ODIHR LEOM was informed that visually impaired voters received election-related information in an audio format. In addition, a list of wheelchair accessible polling stations was published on the CEC website.

B. ELECTORAL SYSTEM

All 100 members of the unicameral parliament are elected to four-year terms in five multi-member constituencies in an open-list proportional representation system. Party lists have to pass a five per cent nationwide threshold to be allocated mandates. The number of seats in each constituency is proportional to the number of eligible voters in the respective constituency and redrawing of

⁵ The word "pegast" means "rural territory" or "rural municipality" in Latvian.

⁶ This is at variance with 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."

⁷ Current Latvian legislation still does not provide for adequate ballot templates and other measures which could enable the visually impaired, or any disabled person, to cast ballots secretly and independently. The Code of Good Practice in Electoral Matters on the Participation of People with Disabilities in Elections stipulates that "voting procedures and facilities should be accessible to people with disabilities so that they are able to exercise their democratic rights, and allow, where necessary, the provision of assistance in voting, with respect to the principle that voting must be individual."

boundaries takes place before each election. The *Sainte-Laguë* method is used on the constituency level to distribute seats to party lists.

Voters cast votes for one of the lists only by placing a plus or a cross sign (“+” or “x”) next to candidates’ names, or by striking out candidates’ names. They can express positive and negative preferences for as many candidates as they wish on one list. The number of points received by each candidate equals the number of the plus signs, lowered by the number of cross-outs received, added to the total number of votes the list received in the constituency. Those candidates with the highest number of points are elected from each list. If two or more candidates on the same list have received an equal number of points, they are ranked in the same order as on the ballot. Voters extensively used this preferential system; 58% of the valid ballots were marked, either positively or negatively.⁸

V. ELECTION ADMINISTRATION

The early parliamentary elections were administered by a three-tiered structure, comprising the CEC, 119 Municipal Election Councils (MECs)⁹ and 1,027 Polling Station Commissions (PSCs), including 77 established abroad.

The CEC is a permanent body appointed for a four-year term. It has nine members, eight appointed by the parliament on the basis of nominations from political parties and one by the Supreme Court. Only the chairperson, deputy chairperson and secretary are professional members who work on a full-time basis. They are supported by eight full-time and three part-time permanent employees. The current CEC members were appointed by the parliament on 7 April 2011.

Overall, the CEC administered these early elections in a professional manner, overcoming substantial time constraints. The official CEC website provided the public with regular updates and CEC members and staff were proactive in sharing information with the OSCE/ODIHR LEOM. CEC sessions were held collegially and were open to international and domestic observers, and the media.

MECs, consisting of 7 to 15 members appointed by local councils, are responsible for establishing PSCs. Political parties and groups of at least ten voters have the right to nominate members to MECs. However, MEC members were generally appointed from amongst municipal employees or other civil servants due to lack of nominations. As observed by the OSCE/ODIHR LEOM, MECs performed their duties in an efficient and professional manner.

PSCs comprise seven members, appointed by respective MECs.¹⁰ Past election administration experience was said to have been the main criteria in the appointment of PSC members. Polling stations (PS) were operational within the legal deadlines. OSCE/ODIHR LEOM interlocutors, including political parties, generally expressed a high level of confidence and satisfaction in the composition of election commissions and in the administration of these elections.

⁸ See <http://web.cvk.lv/pub/public/30182.html>.

⁹ Nine City Election Commissions and 110 Regional Election Commissions.

¹⁰ PSCs established in prisons, foreign countries and on ships are composed of three to seven members.

In late August, the CEC chairperson, deputy chairperson and secretary carried out training seminars for MEC members in Riga and went around the country, providing trainings to PSC chairpersons and secretaries. The CEC also re-introduced its on-line training program for observers with the aim of informing the public about voting and counting procedures and encouraging voluntary observation by citizens. Following such on-line training, 92 non-party observers were accredited by the CEC. The program was also aimed at PSC members and party observers, although only 355 of these completed the training.

A. VOTER REGISTRATION

As in previous parliamentary elections, there were no pre-prepared voter lists in polling stations. Voters' names were added to lists of voters drawn up in all polling stations on election day and voters' passports were stamped as a measure against multiple voting. For these elections, there were 1,542,700 eligible voters. Accepting only passports as a means of identification could have potentially disenfranchised up to 2.6 per cent of electors who did not have a valid passport on election day.¹¹

Voters could cast their ballot in any polling station in the country, and not only in the constituencies where they reside. Although very convenient for voters, such a solution could present significant challenges to election administration. If considerable numbers of voters choose to vote in particular PS, these may lead to overcrowding of the PS and deficit of ballot papers.

B. VOTER EDUCATION

CEC voter education, which started at the beginning of September, increased in intensity as election day approached. A diversity of means, such as the CEC website, information posters at polling stations, newspaper advertisement, and a 24-hour information line were used. CEC also used public and private media, mainly TV and radio stations, to inform voters.¹² In addition, the CEC kept the electorate, political parties and the general public well-informed about electoral preparations and results during a series of press conferences held between 15 and 18 September.

C. OUT-OF-COUNTRY VOTING

For these elections 77 out-of-country polling stations were established in 39 countries, serving 50,616 eligible voters abroad. Voters residing abroad could also vote by mail, making an application from 3 August to 2 September at any of the 21 out-of-country PSCs designated to administer postal voting. For these parliamentary elections, 539 voters registered to vote by mail. OSCE/ODIHR LEOM interlocutors attributed this low number to the reluctance of voters to mail their passports together with their voting envelope in order for passports to be stamped, as prescribed by law.

¹¹ According to the data provided by the Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, on 1 September 2011 there were 38,893 voting-age citizens with no valid passport. A passport costs between 5 and 50 Lats, depending on the age of the applicant and the time required for passport delivery. See http://www.pmlp.gov.lv/en/pakalpojumi/pricelist/passport_fees.html.

¹² Latvijas Radio used ads about mobile voting during the period 7-17 September; there were TV ads on mobile voting and voting procedures during the period 4-17 September on TV1, TV2, TV3, TV5, TV6, and LNT.

D. VOTING IN PRISONS

Prisoners who fulfilled voter eligibility requirements were allowed to vote in prisons on election day, provided they had registered beforehand. Out of 4,686 eligible prisoners, 3,870 registered to vote and 3,861 voted. The number of eligible voters in prisons, together with their personal data, was provided to the administration of the prisons on the basis of the population register.¹³ Prisoners did not require a passport to vote. Polling was administered by the prison authorities, while one prisoner served as an observer. OSCE/ODIHR LEOM interlocutors were satisfied with the conduct of polling in prisons.

E. DOMESTIC AND INTERNATIONAL OBSERVERS

The *Saeima* Election Law does not contain detailed provisions on accreditation procedures or rights and responsibilities of domestic or international observers. However, the CEC accredited 38 international observers, 92 domestic observers, and 13 observers from the Office of Ombudsperson. Party observers did not require prior accreditation from the CEC; rather they registered with the respective PSs on election day. All OSCE/ODIHR observers received official accreditation in a timely manner. In addition to the OSCE/ODIHR, two other international observer groups participated: the European Geopolitical Forum with seven observers, and the Danish NGO ‘SILBA’ with five observers.

VI. CANDIDATE REGISTRATION

In addition to restrictions to participate in elections as an independent candidate, people declared incompetent by a court decision, those serving prison terms, and persons sentenced for intentionally committed crime, but whose sentence has not yet been expunged, cannot run for elections. In addition, people subject to lustration provisions are prohibited to stand as candidates.¹⁴ The European Court of Human Rights stressed that these provisions violate a right of an individual to run for an office and advised to revise them.¹⁵

A total of nine parties and four alliances registered with the CEC to participate in these elections. All parties bar one filed candidate lists in all five constituencies.¹⁶ Altogether, 1,092 candidates ran.¹⁷ Initially, two candidates were removed by the CEC from the lists due to previous convictions under criminal law. These candidates appealed to the Regional Administrative Court, which overturned the

¹³ The register is maintained by the Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs.

¹⁴ Article 5 of the *Saeima* Election Law refers to persons who belonged to the salaried staff of the former Soviet Union’s state security, intelligence or counter-intelligence services.

¹⁵ “The Latvian Parliament must keep the statutory restriction under constant review, with a view to bringing it to an early end.” *Zhdanoka vs. Latvia*, ECtHR, App. no. 58278/00, 16 March 2006. See also *Adamsons vs. Latvia*, ECtHR, App. no. 3669/03, 24 June 2008, where the Court ruled that the restriction violated the applicant’s right to stand.

¹⁶ The ‘Freedom: Free from Fear, Anger and Hate’ party put forward candidate lists in three constituencies.

¹⁷ The lists competing for these elections were numbered by the CEC from one to thirteen, according to drawing lots: 1. ‘Unity’ alliance (*Vienotiba*). In the process of becoming a party, ‘Unity’ had still registered as an alliance; 2. ‘Latvian Social Democratic Workers’ Party’; 3. ‘Zatlers’ Reform party’; 4. ‘Christian Democrat Union’; 5. ‘Slesers’ Reform Party Latvia’s First party/Latvia’s Way’; 6. ‘Concord Centre’ alliance; 7. ‘For Human Rights in a United Latvia’; 8. National Alliance ‘All for Latvia! – For Fatherland and Freedom’ 9. ‘For a Presidential Republic’; 10. ‘Last Party’; 11. ‘Union of Greens and Farmers’ alliance; 12. ‘Control of the People’; 13. ‘Party “Freedom: Free from fear, hate and anger”’.

CEC decisions and candidates have been reinstated. A candidate from the 'For Human Rights in a United Latvia' party filed a complaint with the State Language Centre (SLC) regarding two candidates from the 'Concord Centre' party, alleging that they had insufficient Latvian language proficiency. In response to the complaint, the two 'Concord Centre' candidates were invited to take a language test, however, this complaint was dismissed as unfounded.¹⁸

VII. ELECTION CAMPAIGN

A. POLITICAL CAMPAIGN

The diversity of parties and alliances running offered voters a broad spectrum of political views, ranging from the right wing 'National Alliance' and 'Slesers' Reform Party' to the center right parties 'Unity', 'Zatlers' Reform Party', or the center 'Union of Greens and Farmers', and to more left wing parties such as 'Concord Centre', 'Latvia Social Democratic Party' or 'For Human Rights in a Unified Latvia'. However, many parties' programmes were not always ideologically coherent, often reflecting different political viewpoints. The ethnic and linguistic lines between parties perceived broadly as representing Latvian speakers, and those perceived as representing the Russian-speaking population remained a main divide of the political landscape. Key contenders included both governing alliances – 'Unity' and the 'Union of Greens and Farmers' (running separately), the 'Concord Centre', seen as mainly representing Russian language minority, and the 'Zatlers' Reform Party,' which, despite the short campaign period, quickly gained visibility.

Electoral contestants were able to carry out their activities freely. The campaign was rather low-key and non confrontational, only gaining a higher level of visibility during its last week. The effects of the economic crisis, a shortened campaign period, and cuts in the spending limits had a visible impact on the campaign. All political parties met by the OSCE/ODIHR LEOM pointed to the reduced campaign resources available for these elections. As a result, few posters were visible, few campaign rallies took place, and paid advertising in the media remained limited. Political parties tended to focus on less expensive communication strategies, and more direct communication, such as small gatherings and the use of the internet and social networks.

The main campaign issues revolved around the economic crisis, its budgetary and social consequences, and, to a lesser extent, around the demographic situation of Latvia. An ageing population, a low birth rate and the emigration of Latvian citizens were recurrent topics in parties' programmes. Latvian demographics were the topic of one of the three national debates on LTV1. On 16 September, the last national debate focused on the candidates for the prime minister, a topic that was often a pivotal element of the communication strategy of the key parties and alliances.¹⁹

¹⁸ All three candidates are members of Liepaja City Council. According to the SLC, anyone can make a complaint regarding an elected official's language proficiency. The Election Law does not require Latvian language proficiency as a prerequisite for candidacy. Candidates are required to provide a self-assessment of their Latvian language skills when lodging their nominations with the CEC.

¹⁹ 'Unity' put forward incumbent Prime Minister Dombrovskis, 'Concord Center' put forward Nils Usakovs, mayor of Riga, the 'Union of Greens and Farmers' candidate was Aivars Lembergs, mayor of Ventspils, and 'Zatlers' Reform Party' chose Edmunds Sprudz as its candidate for Prime Minister.

Discontent with the position of the small group of so-called oligarchs, whose influential networks extend from business interests to politics, was noticeable in the political discourse, particularly within the platforms of ‘Unity’ and ‘Zatlers’ Reform Party’.²⁰

Several major parties made efforts to reach out to voters of different linguistic communities and all parties featured candidates from diverse ethnic backgrounds on their candidate lists. OSCE/ODIHR LEOM interlocutors noted these tendencies as an improvement compared to previous election campaigns.

B. CAMPAIGN FINANCING

Well-developed campaign finance rules ensure transparency of this part of the process. Their implementation, including fundraising and spending, is closely monitored by the authorities.

The main change in the legal framework regulating campaign finance since the 2010 parliamentary elections was the reduction of the spending limit. The new campaign expenditure ceiling for these elections was 282,559 Lats for each list. All political parties met by the OSCE/ODIHR LEOM welcomed the re-adjustment of the campaign spending limit.

In addition, two important sets of amendments to the Law on Financing of Political Organizations were passed in 2010 and 2011, which came into effect after these elections. According to these amendments, state funding is available as of January 2012 for those parties or alliances that received at least two per cent of the votes in the parliamentary elections.²¹ Amendments to the Penal Code foreseeing individual criminal liability for various breaches of political financing regulations were adopted on 8 September 2011, just one week before the elections.²² These amendments foresee prison terms of up to six years for those violating the party financing rules.

Campaigns were funded by individual donations, which were limited to 100 minimum monthly salaries.²³ Donations from foreign or anonymous sources or from legal entities were forbidden; ‘third party’ funding was also restricted.²⁴ As a transparency mechanism, parties and alliances were required to declare the amounts and sources of donations to the KNAB for publication on its website. The KNAB, which exercises investigative as well as enforcement powers, had full access to all the financial information and accounting records of political parties. Upon the request of the KNAB, donors were obliged to provide information on their income, savings, and property, as well as documents proving the legality of the sources of donations given. If an electoral contender exceeds the campaign expenditure ceiling, KNAB is empowered to issue administrative fines and to prohibit further campaign activities. KNAB decisions can be appealed to the District Administrative Court.

²⁰ The term “oligarch” was often referred to in the media to mostly three political figures who are linked to business interests: Aivars Slesers, member of the 10th *Saeima*, Aivars Lembergs, Mayor of Ventspils, and Andris Skele, leader of the former People’s Party and elected MP in the 10th *Saeima*.

²¹ Parties will receive 0.50 Lats per calendar year per each vote received.

²² Illegal party financing, intermediation in illegal financing, and the acceptance or extortion of illegal party financing are now considered crimes under Sections 288.2 to 288.5, as added to the Penal Code on 8 September 2011.

²³ Total of 20,000 Lats.

²⁴ The law sets the limit of 15 minimum wages for a “third party” contribution (3,000 Lats).

From the start of electoral process, the KNAB received 74 reports on campaign finance irregularities. Violations, such as a ‘third party’ exceeding the spending limit and illegal donations, were acted upon promptly. An investigation on a complaint alleging that ‘Concord Centre’ and ‘Zatlers’ Reform Party’ were being financed using intermediaries was still pending at the time of deployment of the LEOM. During the campaign, the KNAB also issued warnings to a few ‘third parties’ whose contracts with the media exceeded 3,000 Lats. Most notably, on 15 September, the KNAB decided that one company *Freedomlab*, should stop advertising for a website www.puaro.lv on the basis of exceeding the allowed ceiling. KNAB considered the advertisement as ‘third party’ political campaign material.

Generally, the campaign finance regulations were followed by parties and candidates. None of the parties exceeded the spending ceiling.²⁵

VIII. MEDIA

A. GENERAL MEDIA ENVIRONMENT

The Latvian mass media are free to disseminate information and views and provide the public with a range of different viewpoints. Despite the growth of the internet, television remains the leading source of information.

A number of political parties met by the OSCE/ODIHR LEOM expressed a lack of trust in the fairness and objectivity of the media. The perceived affiliation of certain broadcasters and newspapers with influential businessmen and politicians, as well as the reported practice of unrecorded payments or provision of other benefits by politicians in return for media coverage, remained a concern.

B. LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR THE MEDIA

The Constitution guarantees freedom of expression and explicitly prohibits censorship. Contrary to good practice, defamation remains a criminal offense.²⁶

The Law on the Pre-Election Campaign regulates the election campaign in the media. The law provides rules for free airtime and paid advertisements, stipulates a campaign silence period and regulates the publication of opinion polls. The Regulatory framework for the media also includes the Law on Electronic Media that requires public and commercial broadcasters to display events and facts fairly, objectively and to promote exchange of opinions. The National Electronic Media Council (NEMC) is the regulatory body for all broadcasters.

²⁵ Two, however, came close to it. The ‘Union of Greens and Farmers’ spent 97.4 per cent and ‘Sleser’s Reform Party’ spent 95 per cent of the amount allowed. Three other parties, namely ‘Unity’, ‘Zatler’s Reform Party’, and ‘Concord Center’, have spent over 60 per cent.

²⁶ See Joint Declaration of the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Opinion and Expression, the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media and the Organization of American States Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression, <http://www.osce.org/fom/39838>.

The Law on the Pre-Election Campaign provides each electoral contestant with equal free airtime on public broadcasting companies. In case of early elections, ten minute slots are allocated to all electoral lists on public radio and television, to be used during the last week before election day.

Paid political advertising on public and private media is allowed, although it is limited by a general ceiling on campaign expenditure set by the Law on Financing of Political Organizations. Media are required to provide equal conditions for paid campaign advertisement. When placing such ads, print media and broadcasters have to clearly indicate the electoral contestant or a ‘third party’ that have paid for this advertisement. On the other hand, the electronic and print media are bound to present the rates for political advertising no later than three days after the announcement of elections. This deadline was considerably shortened to adapt to the special conditions of early elections. The KNAB reported that ten media outlets failed to meet this deadline.

The National Electronic Media Council (NEMC) monitored national and local TV and radio stations during the campaign. The NEMC received 17 written complaints or requests for clarification, including complaints regarding unfair coverage.²⁷ In late August, the NEMC reminded all broadcasters to abide by the legal requirement on fairness and objectivity as contained in the Law on Electronic Media. The NEMC informed the OSCE/ODIHR LEOM that a report based on the results of its media monitoring would be published in the first week of November.

The KNAB received some 30 allegations of hidden advertising. The Law on Pre-election Campaign describes hidden political advertising as pre-election propaganda in the sense of direct or indirect invitation to vote for or against a political party, candidates or political organization in return for payment or other agreement, when the payer is not stated.

C. OSCE/ODIHR LEOM MEDIA MONITORING



On 29 August, the OSCE/ODIHR LEOM commenced its media monitoring of a cross-section of media outlets to assess the coverage of the campaign. The monitoring activities focused on five television stations as well as on five daily newspapers.²⁸

Monitoring results indicate that media provided voters with a variety of political opinions overall. The Russian speaking electorate, however, was less exposed to diverse information about the campaign.²⁹

Public TV LTV1 provided an overall balanced coverage of the main contestants, and was largely in a neutral tone in its news, current affairs’ programmes and debates.³⁰ LTV1 fulfilled its obligation to

²⁷ As of 23 September; the law does not specify a deadline to lodge such a complaint.

²⁸ The OSCE/ODIHR LEOM monitored the public broadcaster LTV1 and privately owned LNT, TV3 and TV5 during the prime time period (18:00 – 24:00 hours). In addition, the media monitoring team analyzed the evening program “Latvian Time” on PBK Latvia. The OSCE/ODIHR LEOM also monitored five daily newspapers in Latvian and in Russian languages: *Diena*, *LatvijasAvize*, *Neatkariga Rita Avize*, *Chas* and *Vesti Segodna*. The percentages included in this report refer to news, debates and current affairs programmes.

²⁹ Russian speaking outlets tended to favor the ‘Concord Centre’ in terms of visibility. Russian newspapers were generally less analytical in their approach, at times blending facts and editorial comments. In addition, Russian-speaking TV channels did not offer debates with all the 13 electoral contestants.

provide political parties with free airtime³¹ and organized nine election debates, three of them with all 13 contenders. The other six debates only included parties receiving over two per cent in opinion polls and parties represented in the previous parliament. Some smaller parties expressed their dissatisfaction with their exclusion from some debates based solely on opinion polls.³²

Commercial broadcasters also tended to focus their coverage on the main electoral lists. The Latvian-language TV3 provided 23 per cent to 'Concord Centre', 22 per cent to 'Union of Greens and Farmers', followed by 'Unity' (16 per cent) and 'Zatlers' Reform Party' (14 per cent). 'Slesers' Reform Party' and 'National Alliance' received considerably less coverage (four and seven per cent respectively). LNT allotted 17 per cent of its prime time electoral coverage to 'Unity' and 'Zatler's Reform Party', 16 per cent to 'Union of Greens and Farmers' and 15 per cent to 'Concord Centre'; 'Slesers' Reform Party' received 14 per cent and 'National Alliance' 11 per cent.

Among the Russian-language channels, TV 5 gave more coverage to 'Concord Centre' (22 per cent), followed by 'Zatlers' Reform Party', 'Slesers' Reform Party', 'Unity' and 'For Human Rights in a United Latvia' (PCTVL) with some 12 per cent each. The 'Union of Greens and Farmers' received six per cent. The First Baltic Channel (PBK) gave a greater weight to 'Concord Centre' (27 per cent). 'Slesers' Reform Party' and 'Unity' received 18 and 17 per cent respectively, while 'Union of Greens and Farmers' and 'Zatlers' Reform Party' received 12 and 11 per cent. Private broadcasters occasionally showed political preferences in the portrayal of events and contestants; for instance, PBK often covered 'Concord Centre' in a positive light. During the monitored period, privately-owned channel LNT held two debates with six parties, while TV3 held a debate with five contenders. TV5 also organized discussions with parties' representatives, while PBK aired election interviews.

Coverage of the campaign in the print media included interviews with candidates, experts' comments and editorials. Among the Latvian-language newspapers, *Diena* provided an overall balanced coverage of all key contenders. *Latvijas Avize* focused on the main parties, but it gave considerably less coverage to 'Slesers' Reform Party', while it was at times critical of other parties, including 'Concord Centre' and PCTVL. The Latvian-language paper *Neatkarīga Rīta Avize*, favoured the 'Union of Greens and Farmers' and covered 'Zatlers' Reform Party' negatively. The Russian-language dailies *Chas* and *Vesti Segodna* favoured 'Concord Centre' and negatively portrayed some other contenders.

Information about the campaign was also available in online newspapers and on the main internet news portals. Parties' websites were used to present parties' programs and leaders' statements and their multimedia contents were in the form of audiovisual files containing interviews and political advertisement. Seven parties had their website, or part of it, in both Latvian and Russian. Social network accounts and, to a lesser extent, websites were used not only to present the strengths of the respective party through links and comments, but also to note the perceived weaknesses of their

³⁰ 'Concord Centre', 'Zatlers' Reform Party', 'Unity', 'Unions of Greens and Farmers', 'Slesers' Reform Party' and 'National Alliance/LNNK' received from 10 to 14 per cent. An additional 3 per cent was allotted to the Government (to members of the Government in their official capacities).

³¹ Some media outlets indicated that a ten minute slot is not an effective tool to held viewers' attention and suggested to break the free airtime into different length time slots, to be aired at different occasions during the campaign.

³² 'People's Control Party' filed a complaint with various institutions for not have being invited to the LTV1 regional debates. This complaint was dismissed.

political opponents. Almost all lists had an active website as well as Facebook and Twitter accounts; eight lists used posts on www.draugiem.lv – the most popular social network in Latvia.

Electoral contenders were at times objects of negative campaign strategies aiming to discredit their reputation. This phenomenon described as *kompromat* or ‘black PR’ was visible in the media during the campaign. An example of negative campaigning was the advertisement campaign of the website www.puaro.lv aired by the private TV channel LNT and published by the daily *Latvias Avize*. A version of this advertisement contained an implicit accusation that the Minister of Justice and ‘Unity’ candidate Aigars Stokenbergs had not paid taxes.

IX. COMPLAINTS AND APPEALS

The legal framework provides for the right to legal redress and establishes different channels for the adjudication of electoral complaints. While it is generally conducive to enable effective remedy for the complainant, further review is necessary in order to comply fully with the OSCE commitments and other international obligations.³³

CEC decisions on the registration or rejection of candidate lists can be appealed to Regional Administrative Courts whose decision is final. The CEC also decides on complaints on election results. These decisions are subject to appeal to the Supreme Court.

Voters can file a complaint about the voting process to the polling station chairperson verbally or in writing, and the complaint should be reviewed immediately. Legislation is not clear, however, whether it is the chairperson or the PSC that is to decide on the complaint.³⁴ Moreover, electoral legislation does not provide voters with the right to further appeal this decision. Voters may, however, ask the CEC to review it. But the CEC is not explicitly bound to review PSC decisions.³⁵ The OSCE/ODIHR LEOM was informed that the CEC would also accept informal complaints, made over telephone. Voters could also appeal PSC decisions to the District Administrative Court and - according to some interpretations - to the MEC, under regular administrative procedure. However, in this latter case the possibility of a timely legal redress would be compromised as remedy would not be provided until after elections.³⁶

³³ Paragraph 5.10 of the 1990 OSCE Copenhagen Document requires everyone to “have an effective means of redress against administrative decisions.” Article 2 of the ICCPR requires that “any person whose rights or freedoms are herein recognized as violated shall have an effective remedy” and the Human Rights Committee General Comment 31 refers to the “obligation to investigate allegations of violations promptly, thoroughly and effectively through independent and impartial bodies”.

³⁴ The *Saeima* Election Law states that complaints “shall be immediately filed with the chairperson” of the PSC. However, under Article 16 of the Law on City, District, County and Pegaasts Election Commissions and Polling Station Commissions, it should be also the decision of the PSCs, taken by the “majority of the total number of commission members.” OSCE/ODIHR LEOM was informed that practices among the polling stations vary considerably.

³⁵ The *Saeima* Election Law does not mention appeals against the PSC decisions, but it is envisaged by Article 6 of the Law on the Central Election Commission.

³⁶ The Venice Commission’s Code of Good Practice in Electoral Matters, states that “failure to comply with the electoral law must be open to challenge before an appeal body” and emphasizes the importance of having appeals resolved in a timely manner, [http://www.venice.coe.int/docs/2002/CDL-AD\(2002\)023-e.pdf](http://www.venice.coe.int/docs/2002/CDL-AD(2002)023-e.pdf).

Only a small number of complaints were filed with the election administration and the courts. Most notably, the CEC rejected the candidacies of two people from the list of the 'Christian Democratic Union' who had been convicted for crimes in 2010, although they were sentenced for acts, which under the amended Penal Code on 1 January 2011 were no longer considered crimes. Both candidates appealed the CEC decision. On 7 September 2011, the Regional Administrative Court overturned it, basing its judgment on the fact that the recent amendment to the Penal Code resulted in their criminal record having been expunged.

X. PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN

Latvia acceded to the UN Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1992. It also committed itself to making gender equality an integral part of its policies and achieving equality of opportunities for women and men. While there are no formal obstacles to the equal political participation of women, there are also no special provisions supporting it and women remain under-represented in the main decision-making bodies.

Women make up 53.8 per cent of Latvia's population.³⁷ While the CEC does not publish gender-disaggregated data on number of eligible voters or turnout, it is estimated that women constitute about 55 per cent of the electorate.³⁸ Only three out of nine members of the CEC were women, whereas the proportion was higher in MECs and PSCs.

There were 21 women in the outgoing parliament, and 2 of the 13 ministerial posts were held by women. None of the political parties or alliances met by the OSCE/ODIHR LEOM reported any internal mechanisms to promote gender equality in their lists. Out of 1,092 candidates, 331 were women (30.3 per cent). This represented a slight increase compared to the 28.6 per cent (353 out of 1,235 candidates) who contested the parliamentary elections in 2010. There was a considerable difference in the proportion of women that various parties put forward. The list of 'Freedom: Free from Fear, Hate and Anger' had the largest percentage of female candidates (74.1 per cent), while the lowest number (21.7 per cent) of women candidates was on the lists of the 'Concord Centre'. Nearly one third of all female contenders ran in the Riga constituency.

Twenty-one women were elected to the 11th parliament. As in the outgoing parliament, the proportion of women is highest among the 'Unity' MPs (30 per cent) and lowest among elected deputies from the 'Concord Centre' (9.7 per cent).

The absence of gender policies from the political agenda, fewer financial resources available to women for campaign, and the lack of party support for women politicians were key factors reported to the OSCE/ODIHR LEOM for a low level of political participation.

³⁷ Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia. See <http://www.csb.gov.lv/en>.

³⁸ *Id.*

XI. PARTICIPATION OF NATIONAL MINORITIES AND NON-CITIZENS

The resident population of Latvia includes representatives of a number of ethnic and linguistic minorities. Ethnic Latvians make up 59.5 per cent of the population, while ethnic Russians are the largest minority, at 27.3 per cent of the population.³⁹ Other minorities include Belarusians, Ukrainians, Poles and Lithuanians.

Out of the 1,092 registered candidates, 117 belonged to the Russian minority, 790 declared themselves to be ethnic Latvian and 133 chose not to declare their ethnic background; the rest were people of other ethnic backgrounds. The outgoing parliament had 15 members who identified themselves as belonging to national minorities, 13 of whom were of Russian ethnicity.⁴⁰ In the 11th parliament, 18 members identify themselves as belonging to national minorities, of which 13 identify themselves as of Russian ethnicity.

After the restoration of Latvia's independence in 1991, citizenship was granted automatically to holders of Latvian citizenship prior to 1940 and to their descendants, leaving a large number of Latvian residents without Latvian or other citizenship. Currently, there are 319,267 people, about 14 per cent of the population, registered as "non-citizens". The vast majority of these are of voting age, although they do not possess voting rights.⁴¹ According to Article 26 of the Law on Political Parties, non-citizens have the right to join political parties as long as they do not make up half or more of members.⁴² They may also make financial contributions to political parties. Most non-citizens are people belonging to national minorities.

Citizenship may be obtained through registration for children under 15 whose parents are non-citizens, and by adults through a naturalization process.⁴³ Since 2006, the naturalization rate of non-citizens has dropped significantly.⁴⁴ Reasons cited by OSCE/ODIHR LEOM interlocutors for the low naturalization rate include difficulties with the examinations, objections to having to undertake the naturalization process, and pragmatic reasons such as non-citizens' ability to travel visa-free throughout the European Union and to Russia. The absence of public policies to engage non-citizens into the naturalization process was also cited as a reason.

In a positive development, regulations of the Cabinet of Ministers were approved in July 2011 that streamlined procedures for the registration of non-citizen children as citizens of Latvia at the time of birth. On 1 February 2011, former President Zatlers proposed several changes to the Citizenship Law to the parliament, including a provision to provide automatic citizenship to the newborn children of

³⁹ Data from the Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs, Ministry of Interior, as of 1 July 2011. See <http://www.pmlp.gov.lv>.

⁴⁰ Candidates have the option to declare their ethnicity when registering with the CEC.

⁴¹ 306,400 non-citizens were of voting age at the time of elections. Data from the Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs, Ministry of Interior.

⁴² Article 26, paragraph 3 of the Law on Political Parties states that only parties in which there are not less than 200 citizens of Latvia may operate in Latvia, and in a party with more than 400 members, not less than half of all the members shall be citizens of Latvia.

⁴³ Naturalization requirements include continuous residence in the country for at least five years, passing of exams in Latvian, and knowledge of the country's constitution and history. Facilitation measures, such as a simplified exams, are available for certain groups such as persons over 65.

⁴⁴ The number of naturalizations in 2006 was 16,439; in 2007 it was 6,826; in 2008: 3,004, in 2009: 2,080, and in 2010: 2,336. Data from the Office from Citizenship and Migration Affairs, Ministry of Interior.

non-citizens, unless the parents refuse. The proposal was still under discussion in the previous *Saeima* at the time of its dissolution.⁴⁵

The Constitution provides for the right of national minorities to preserve and develop their language and their ethnic and cultural identity, but Latvian is the only official language. While free Latvian language courses are sometimes available for certain groups such as the unemployed, OSCE/ODIHR LEOM interlocutors indicated that demand for such opportunities exceeds supply.⁴⁶

Authorities interpreted the Official Language Law as prohibiting voter education and information materials in languages other than Latvian, thus potentially disadvantaging voters with a low proficiency in the Latvian language.⁴⁷ The CEC website featured basic information about the election in English and Russian. According to the Official Language Law, all official communication must be either in Latvian, or accompanied by a certified translation (with some exceptions).⁴⁸ In some polling stations visited by the OSCE/ODIHR LEOM observers on election day, PSC members said that they were prepared to assist voters in Russian if needed.

XII. ELECTION DAY

In line with its methodology, OSCE/ODIHR LEOM did not conduct a comprehensive and systematic observation on election day, but did observe a limited number of polling stations across the country.

Voting was conducted from 08:00 to 20:00. By a recent amendment to the *Saeima* Election Law, 124 polling stations across the country remained open until 22:00 to extend voting possibilities to more of the electorate. In polling stations visited by the OSCE/ODIHR LEOM, procedures were applied uniformly and voting was conducted with only a few incidents of a minor nature.⁴⁹ Unfortunately, and despite CEC efforts, the layout of polling stations and general overcrowding did not always ensure secrecy of the vote.⁵⁰ Family voting was also observed at several polling stations. A few parties made use of the right to field observers at polling stations. Voter turnout, was announced at 59.49 percent.

⁴⁵ The OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities and UNHCR expressed support for this proposal. The statement by OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities to the OSCE Permanent Council of 16 June 2011 is available at <http://www.osce.org/hcnm/78915>. The OSCE HCNM also encouraged Latvia to grant citizenship to all non-citizens born in Latvia since 1991.

⁴⁶ For example, Riga city authorities informed the OSCE/ODIHR LEOM that free language courses organized by the city in the summer and fall of 2011 filled up quickly.

⁴⁷ The UN Human Rights Committee, for example, recommends that “information and materials about voting should be available in minority languages.” See General Comment 25 on Article 25 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. 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”.

⁴⁸ Most MECs asked by the OSCE/ODIHR LEOM indicated willingness to accept complaints in Russian.

⁴⁹ The police registered 113 election infringements on election day, most of these were in relation to non-removal of electoral propaganda. The police received small number of complaints in relation to vote-buying but found no evidence to support the complaints. Some voters complained about having received an anonymous SMS urging support for a particular political party.

⁵⁰ In line with previous OSCE/ODIHR recommendations, the CEC adopted a new instruction regarding the positioning of polling booths to better ensure the secrecy of the vote.

Voting in those prisons visited by the OSCE/ODIHR LEOM was orderly and well-organized. All voting materials were transferred to regular polling stations for counting.⁵¹ As declared by the Office of the Ombudsperson, their observers were present for the voting in a majority of prisons.

Counting was noted as being orderly and transparent by OSCE/ODIHR LEOM. In the polling stations visited, procedures were followed and all key elements of the counting process were adhered to. Due to preferential voting, counting was protracted and cumbersome, especially at polling stations with high numbers of voters.

The only valid marks to indicate preference for a candidate were ‘+’ or ‘x’, and this was not observed to result in a significant number of invalid votes for any given candidate.⁵² The introduction of scanners at some polling stations greatly facilitated and accelerated the counting process.⁵³ The CEC employed new software for the aggregation of results whereby digital protocols were transmitted via internet connection from polling stations directly to the national level.⁵⁴ This measure enabled timely on-line announcement of provisional results. Only one complaint about the counting process was registered with the CEC; it was related to the absence of a live-feed screen to enable observers to follow the counting in six polling stations.⁵⁵

XIII. RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are offered for consideration by the authorities, political parties and civil society of the Republic of Latvia, in further support of their efforts to conduct elections fully in line with OSCE commitments and other standards for democratic elections. These recommendations should be read in conjunction with past OSCE/ODIHR recommendations that remain to be addressed. OSCE/ODIHR stands ready to assist the authorities of the Republic of Latvia to further improve the electoral process and in following up on the recommendations contained in this and previous reports.

Priority recommendations

1. In line with the OSCE Copenhagen Document, which specifically protects the right of individual candidates to run for office without political party affiliation, the legislation should be revised to enable candidates to run independently.
2. Consistent with the judgment of the European Court of Human Rights, the *Saeima* should continue to review lustration provisions with a view to bringing them to the end.
3. Measures should be taken to ensure the secrecy of the vote, including through voter information programs, training of polling station officials, mechanisms against overcrowding in polling stations, and the discouragement of family voting.

⁵¹ The votes of prisoners were added to the votes cast at regular polling stations.

⁵² Ballots marked differently were considered invalid even if the intention of voter was clear. The CEC did not receive any complaints from political parties on this issue.

⁵³ A pilot project introduced scanners to the counting process in 31 per cent of the country’s polling stations.

⁵⁴ The BALSIS software was provided by SOAAR, a Latvian company.

⁵⁵ This complaint was lodged by the ‘Concord Centre’ on 20 September 2011.

4. Latvian authorities should consider a more flexible approach to the provision of official voter information in minority languages, which would be consistent with international human rights standards and send a positive message of inclusion to people belonging to national minorities.

Legal framework

5. Efforts should be increased to fully enable voters with disabilities to exercise their right to a secret ballot, in line with the OSCE Copenhagen Document and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

6. Consideration could be given to establishing a clear and formalized mechanism for processing voters' appeals within the electoral administration.

Election Administration

7. If the CEC continues with plans to introduce new technologies in the counting process, consideration should be given to ensuring comprehensive training and a detailed procedural manual for polling station members.

8. In order to respect the intention of voters, the CEC should consider as valid those marks on ballots that are not a '+' or an 'x', but that clearly indicate the voter's intention.

Domestic and International Observers

9. The CEC should adopt a comprehensive regulation on the role of international and domestic non-partisan observers and accreditation procedures ahead of the next elections.

Media

10. More detailed guidelines should be drafted to better define balanced, objective and fair coverage as required by Article 24 part 4 of the Law on Electronic Media, in order to provide guidance to the media when reporting on the electoral process. Self-regulation may promote greater awareness and journalistic standards, while increasing the legitimacy of the rules in place.

11. In order to enhance transparency and confidence in the process, the NEMC could foresee publishing interim reports on its monitoring activities during the election campaign.

12. Consideration should be given to de-criminalize defamation, in line with international recommendations.

13. Consideration should be given to foresee a diverse allocation of the free airtime in order to provide opportunities for contestants to attract viewers' attention. Free-of-charge, 10 minutes slots could be broken into different length time slots, allowing parties a mixture of lengthy and reasoned argument, on the one hand, and quick advertising messages on the other, to be aired at different occasions in the pre-election period.

Women participation

14. Consideration should be given to creating a more conducive environment for the full participation of women in political life. The *Saeima* should undertake greater efforts in putting gender equality on the political agenda and raising awareness of inequalities that still exist.

15. Consideration should be given to capacity-building programs within political parties targeting women politicians, methods of attracting more women candidates, mechanisms for ensuring a more balanced proportion of women on candidate lists, as well as ways of supporting campaign of women candidates.

National minorities and non-citizens

16. Latvian authorities should consider measures to accelerate the naturalization rate, such as exempting people over 65 from all examinations, conducting public campaigns to encourage naturalization, and expanding access to free Latvian language courses. On the other hand, civil society organizations and minority community representatives should undertake efforts to encourage non-citizens to actively engage in civic and political affairs, including through completing the naturalization process.

17. The newly elected MPs should take up the proposals under discussion in the previous *Saeima* to automatically grant citizenship to the newborn children of non-citizens, as this will help prevent the issue of non-citizenship from continuing into the future.

ANNEX: OFFICIAL ELECTION RESULTS

Political party or alliance	Percentage of valid votes	Number of mandates
1. UNITY (Vienotība)	18.8	20
2. LATVIAN SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC WORKERS' PARTY (Latvijassociāldemokrātiskāstrādniekupartija)	0.27	0
3. ZATLERS' REFORM PARTY (Zatlerareformupartija)	20.809	22
4. CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATIC UNION (KristīgiDemokrātiskāpartija)	0.217	0
5. SLESERS' REFORM PARTY (Latvia's First Party/ Latvian Way) (Šleserareformupartija LLP/LC)	2,415	0
6. HARMONY CENTER (Saskaņascentrs)	28,433	31
7. FOR HUMAN RIGHTS IN UNITED LATVIA (PCTVL)	0.778	0
8. ALL FOR LATVIA (FOR FATHERLAND AND FREEDOM/LNNK) (Nacionālāapvienība "VisuLatvijai")	13.863	14
9. FOR PRESIDENTIAL REPUBLIC (Par PrezidentāluRepubliku)	0.314	0
10. THE LAST PARTY (Pēdējāpartija)	0.488	0
11. UNION OF GREEN AND FARMERS (ZaļoZemniekuSavienība)	12.190	13
12. PEOPLE'S CONTROL (TautasKontrole)	0.282	0
13. PARTY FREEDOM: FREE FROM FAIR, HATE, ANGER (PartijaBrīvība. BBND)	0.218	0

For these elections, there were 1,542,700 eligible voters; 917,713 of these voted, resulting in a voter turnout of 59.49 per cent.

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 standards for democratic elections and 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 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.

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