



Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights

**Assessment Mission – Latvia
Parliamentary Election and Referendum
October 3, 1998**



Press Release

RIGA, 5.10.1998 In furtherance of an invitation from the Minister of Foreign Affairs the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights has conducted and is continuing to conduct an assessment of the Latvian electoral arrangements including the legal and administrative provisions and their implementation by the various electoral bodies.

The ODIHR appointed Mr. Peter Hatch to lead the assessment and he has been assisted by 15 election experts from Austria, Bulgaria, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Norway, Poland, Sweden, United Kingdom and the United States of America.

The assessment mission has been given invaluable logistical support from the OSCE Mission to Latvia.

An assessment of the pre-election-phase started on 17th September with election experts deployed in all five constituencies. The assessment continued through to election day in respect of the polling and counting procedures. An assessment of the tabulation and consolidation of the polling station results at district level was also carried out and this exercise will be continued through to the final stage at Central Election Commission level.

Full co-operation was extended to the ODIHR experts by the Central Election Commission as well as election administration at all levels.

OSCE ODIHR Conclusions

The Assessment Mission has concluded the following:

- The National Referendum and the Parliamentary Election held on 3rd October 1998 were, overall, conducted in a transparent and professional manner.
- The assessment mission was impressed by a high level of openness thus contributing to public confidence in the electoral process.
- The integrity of the process was upheld by well trained competent commission members who displayed complete independence and impartiality which is essential to the legitimacy and credibility of the electoral process.
- Due recognition should be given to the members of the various election commissions who played an essential role in the provision of effective and efficient electoral administration.

- An election process in any country may be subject to imperfections and Latvia is no exception. A number of technical deficiencies have been identified by the Mission and these will be the subject of a more detailed report. It is encouraging to note that there is an awareness on the part of the CEC of minor deficiencies and a desire to improve arrangements for future elections.
- The constraint of the legal provisions in respect of the wording of the referendum question to the voters is of concern. The legal provisions prescribed the wording of the referendum ballot paper, and given this constraint and possible confusion on the part of the electorate a voter education exercise was conducted by the CEC immediately prior to polling day. In addition guidance notices were displayed in all polling stations and polling booths. The political parties as well as the media also played a part in clarifying the referendum. All of this activity, to enable voters to mark the Referendum ballot paper so as to reflect their preference, is to be commended.

A detailed Assessment Report will be released shortly after the conclusion of the overall process.

For further information please contact Mr. Peter Hatch c/o the OSCE Mission to Latvia (PH + 371 732 44 67), The Head of the ODIHR Election Section, Mr Gerald Mitchell or Ms Vibeke Greni, Public Affairs adviser of the ODIHR (PH +48 22 520 06 00).