



Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights

PRELIMINARY STATEMENT ON THE PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS REPUBLIC OF LITHUANIA OCTOBER 20, 1996

Upon receipt of an official invitation by the Central Election Commission of the Republic of Lithuania, an On-site Co-ordinator for the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), Professor Frank Aarebrot, observed the election campaign and the balloting during October 9 - October 20.

Prior to the elections, the ODIHR On-site Co-ordinator and his staff met with numerous individuals and organisations, including the President of the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania, the Central Election Committee, several Area Election Committees, several District Election Committees, and a broad range of political parties, the Director General of the Lithuanian Radio and TV Corporation, the Director General of the Baltic Television, the Director of Baltic Surveys, and representatives of Info-Tec, who operate the scanning equipment to be used for counting individual preferences on party lists in the national ballots.

The co-operation and assistance extended to the ODIHR On-site Co-ordinator by the Danish and British Embassies to Lithuania, in the form of administrative and logistical support, was greatly appreciated. The ODIHR is also grateful for the personnel and logistical support rendered by the Finnish Ambassador in his capacity as Chairman of the meeting of the European Union's Ambassadors to Lithuania, who provided vital personnel and logistical support from a number of EU Embassies. Personnel was also generously provided by several educational programs currently active in Lithuania such as the Civic Education Project, National Democratic Institute, International Republican Institute, Central and East European Law Initiative, and the German Language Institute.

Prior to the election, the ODIHR On-site Co-ordinator and his staff monitored the postal voting system, including a visit to the special postal office established to enable voting by the prisoners of Pravieniskiu Prison. The ODIHR On-site Co-ordinator and his staff also monitored the preparation for the election in several Area Election Committees.

The staff of long term observers were the following: Frank Aarebrot, Norway, On-site Co-ordinator; Christian Christensen, Denmark, Deputy Co-ordinator; and K. Elizabeth Ryder, United States, Personnel and Logistics Co-ordinator.

On election day the ODIHR On-site Co-ordinator's staff of long-term observers and the short-term observers of the OSCE observed voting in 90% of the single member constituencies of Lithuania.

In addition, the ODIHR On-site Co-ordinator and his staff briefed and debriefed the corps of approximately 40 observers from 12 OSCE countries. The countries participating were Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Norway, Poland, the Russian Federation, Spain, Sweden, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

It is concluded that elections for Representatives to the Parliament (Seimas) of the Republic of Lithuania in the first round of elections for the single member constituencies, the election for the national party lists, and four referenda questions on two ballots, were conducted in accordance with internationally accepted standards of democratic intentions.

Although the professionalism of officials administering the elections was generally high, the lack of resources meant to be provided by local councils contributed to varying levels of organisational proficiency.

ELECTION DAY OBSERVATIONS:

Despite a generally efficient administration and the democratic spirit under which the elections were conducted, there was some concern drawn from election day observations.

Voting by Secret Ballot

During the voting, on numerous occasions voters chose to vote openly in front of each other. In most of the larger polling stations too few private booths were available. In a few polling stations, private polling booths were not even provided, as required by law. In such cases, voters were required to vote in less than private circumstances.

The Lithuanian election law specifically requires to cast their ballots in the privacy of a polling booth. The observed practice in Lithuania appears to give voters the prerogative to vote outside the privacy of the polling booth. Although the general impression was one of proceedings conforming to democratic norms, it cannot be ignored that open voting is contrary to Lithuania's election law and to democratic norms in general. This practice invites the potential for voter intimidation or manipulation.

A final report including specific recommendations will soon be submitted to the OSCE Permanent Council and to the Lithuanian authorities.

For further information, please contact Frank Aarebrot in Lithuania until October 25th, who can be reached at number 8 298 39043, Christian Christensen at number 8 298 39048, or Vladimir Shkolnikov of the ODIHR office at number 48 22 625 7040.