

SEMINAR ON THE DRAFT ELECTORAL LAW OF LATVIA

Riga, 30 April - 1 May 1992

Secretariat memorandum

1. Within the framework of its Demosthene programme, the Council of Europe organised in conjunction with the Commission a Seminar on the draft electoral law of Latvia.

The Rapporteurs on Latvia, Messrs Russell and Suviranta travelled to Riga, accompanied by Mr Lamponi and assisted by the following experts : Mr Garrone (Geneva), Mr Owen (Paris) and Mr Sexton (Dublin). The Parliamentary Assembly was represented by Mr Hartland.

2. The first part of the Seminar was devoted to a meeting with representatives of political parties and fractions, be they represented in the Supreme Council or not, with the Deputy Chairman of the Supreme Court Mr Birkavs in the Chair.

The speakers gave general introductory talks on the various aspects of the different electoral systems and on their respective implications, and replied to numerous and pertinent questions from the floor.

3. The second part of the Seminar consisted in a closed meeting of the Rapporteurs and experts with the Parliamentary Working Group on the electoral law, chaired by Mr Endzins.

During this meeting the text of the draft law (CDL (92) 27) was examined first in general and then chapter by chapter.

4. The Latvian authorities explained that the draft law had to comply with certain requirements of the Constitution in force, e.g. age limit 21 years, proportional system, etc. It was not foreseen to amend the Constitution before the parliamentary elections, scheduled for October 1993; the law would govern only these particular elections.

5. Apart from a number of comments on points of detail, the experts focused on the main issue of how to ensure stability without affecting adequate representation of the people. It was pointed out in particular that the draft as it stands, with only five large constituencies, left the door open to a large number of small parties being represented in parliament.

6. The Latvian authorities undertook to submit to the experts a revised version of Article 51 of the draft law, on which the experts will be invited to comment in writing.

7. The Seminar ended with a press conference. The Council of Europe delegation met in private a delegation of the Latvian Citizens' Congress, at the request of the latter.