



REPORT OF PES STUDY VISIT TO LATVIA Riga, 29 – 30 May, 2007

1. Context of the fact-finding mission

Following the general elections that took place on 7 October 2006, the PES Coordination Team and Presidency discussed the situation of the left in Latvia and decided to send a fact-finding mission to better understand the situation.

Main factors for the left are the following :

- PES Member party, LSDSP failed for the second time to enter the national parliament. After many years of internal struggle, it is now undergoing deep restructuring.
- The Concord centre, a Russian community based coalition declaring itself social-democrat, entered Parliament with 17 seats and has applied for membership to the SI and PES. The SI Ethics Committee has decided to wait for the result of the PES evaluation before making its decision.

The role of the delegation was to evaluate the situation and advise the Coordination Team and Presidency on the one hand on the application for membership of the Concord centre and on the other hand on possible ways to strengthen the left in Latvia.

The delegation was composed of :

Philip Cordery, PES Secretary General

Lena Hjelm-Wallén, former Minister for Foreign Affairs, SAP, Sweden

Katrin Saks, MEP, Vice-Chair of SDE Estonia

Peter Palshøj, Secretary General of SAMAK

Jorgen Siil, International secretary, SDE Estonia

Martin Sandgren, Deputy International Secretary SAP, Sweden

Saray Espejo - PES Secretariat - Relations with members

During its 2 day visit, the delegation met with representatives of the two parties, LSDPD and Concord Centre and with many independent personalities.



2. Facts on Latvia

2.1 Results of the General election, 7th October 2006

In the last general elections, held on the 7th October 2006, 19 lists ran for the elections, 7 of which reached the 5% threshold. Turn out was 62,23% (901,173 out of 1,448,039 eligible voters).

Currently, the Latvian political scene is eclipsed by the right wing parties. All of the three members of the outgoing right-of-centre coalition gained parliamentary representation and formed a new government led by Prime Minister Aigars Kalvītis. The **People's Party** (party of the Prime Minister), gained 23 seats and has 6 Ministers in the current government, the **Union of Greens and Farmers** 18 seats and 5 Ministers and **Latvia's First Party/Latvia's Way** 10 seats and 4 Ministers. The government was also extended to the nationalist party **For Fatherland and Freedom** (8 seats, 3 Ministers)

Main opposition party is the conservative party **New Era** (18 seats).

In the Russian community, the party **For Human Rights in United Latvia** lost 19 seats, mainly to the benefit of the **Concord Centre**, which enters Parliament with 17 seats.

Parties and coalitions	Votes	%	Seats	Change
People's Party (<i>Tautas partija</i>)	177, 481	19.56	23	+3
Union of Greens and Farmers (<i>Zaļo un Zemnieku savienība</i>)	151, 595	16.71	18	+6
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Latvian Farmers' Union (<i>Latvijas Zemnieku savienība</i>)Green Party of Latvia (<i>Latvijas Zaļā partija</i>)				
New Era (<i>Jaunais Laiks</i>)	148, 602	16.38	18	-8
Harmony Centre (<i>Saskaņas centrs</i>)	130, 887	14.42	17	+17
<ul style="list-style-type: none">National Harmony Party (<i>Tautas saskaņas partija</i>)Latvian Socialist Party (<i>Latvijas Sociālistiskā partija</i>)				
Coalition of Latvia's First Party (<i>Latvijas Pirmā partija</i>) and Latvian Way (<i>Latvijas Ceļš</i>)	77, 869	8.58	10	+/-0
For Fatherland and Freedom (<i>Tēvzemei un Brīvībai/LNNK</i>)	62, 989	6.94	8	+1
For Human Rights in United Latvia (<i>Par cilvēka tiesībām vienotā Latvijā</i>)	54, 684	6.03	6	-19
Latvian Social Democratic Labour Party (<i>Latvijas Sociāldemokrātiskā strādnieku partija</i>)	31, 728	3.5	0	
Motherland (<i>Dzimtene</i>)	18, 860	2.08	0	
All For Latvia! (<i>Visu Latvijai!</i>)	13, 469	1.48	0	
New Democrats (<i>Jaunie Demokrāti</i>)	11, 505	1.27	0	
Total	901,173	100.0	100	



2.2 Representation in the European Parliament (Latvia has 9 MEPs)

- the People's Party has 1 in the EPP-ED Group
- Latvia's Way has 1 in ALDE
- For Fatherland and Freedom has 4 in UEN
- New Era has 2 in EPP-ED
- For Human Rights in United Latvia has 1 in Greens/EFA (regionalists)

2.3 The ethnic factor

During the Soviet period, which ended in 1991, Latvia underwent heavy industrialization, and experienced a big influx of immigrants from other parts of the USSR, mainly Russia. 37% of the population (800.000) is Russian-speaking and the rights of this section of society have been a thorny issue since independence.

Legislation on citizenship was toughened in 2006. Candidates who fail a Latvian language test three times will be denied citizenship. Around half of the Russian speaking population (400.000 people) is without citizenship. They are neither entitled to vote nor to obtain an EU passport.

Ethnicity is still an essential factor in elections. People vote for the party that better represent their ethnic group. The ethnic division seems to be more important than the social one. There is for example no clear link between social background and vote intention; ethnicity prevails over any other argument when deciding whom to vote for.

3. The Latvian Social Democratic Workers' Party (*Latvijas Sociāldemokrātiskā Strādnieku Partija*), LSDSP

LSDSP is the oldest organized political party in Latvia, its roots in the workers' groups of the New Current that were founded as early as 1892, when Latvia was still part of the Russian Empire. LSDSP was banned after the 1934 coup by Kārlis Ulmanis, together with all other political parties, and remained banned after the Soviet annexation in 1940. When many Latvians left Latvia during World War II, LSDSP was restored as an "exile organization" operating in Sweden in 1945 and, later, other Western countries as well. When Latvia became independent again in 1990, LSDSP returned to Latvia and played a big role in the formation of the independent Latvia. In early 1990s, it struggled with internal splits. At one point, Latvia had 3 social democratic parties, two of them being descendants of LSDSP and the third being the reformed faction of former Communist Party of Latvia. Eventually, all three parties merged, under the name of LSDSP.

The merged party (Leader Juris Bojars) enjoyed some success in parliamentary elections in 1998, winning 14 seats out of 100 and in local elections in 2001, when one of its members, Gundars Bojārs (the son of the Leader) became the mayor of Riga. Corruption scandals led to the split of the party and to a defeat in the 2002 legislative elections (4% of the vote – no representation in Parliament) and in the 2005 municipal elections (7 seats in the Riga City Council). LSDSP is also in coalition with different parties in other municipalities.

The parliamentary elections of 2006 brought even more dissatisfactory results for LSDSP as the party did not pass the 5% threshold, for the second election in a row.



The weakness of the party can be explained by several factors :

- **corruption scandals** linked to the old leadership (esp. Bojars in Riga)
- a **problem of image**. LSDSP is seen as an old-fashioned party with old rethorics. Social democracy is still usually related to the old Soviet regime.
- difficulties due to the **ethnic divide**. There is an understanding, in the media and in public opinion, developed by the ruling right wing forces, that left wing parties are Russian and that right wing parties are ethnic Latvian.
- no public **party financing**. Each party has to raise its funds through membership (very low) and private contributions. The major parties, especially on the right, receive many funds and are often owned and therefore run by oligarchs. Those opposing the system lack funding and are therefore discriminated during election campaigns.

Being aware about its current weaknesses, the party is undergoing a deep renovation process, of its structures and of its political discourse.

Regarding structures, the party has elected a new leadership which clearly differentiates itself with the previous one. The new party leader Janis Dinevics is very engaged in reforming the party, changing its image (including the branding) and renewing its leaders. One of the leading figures is Dainis Ivans, Vice-Chair of the party and member of PES Presidency, who is a well recognised politician who played an active role in the independence process of Latvia and enjoys big support in the population. The party is also very keen on involving very actively the youth branch of the party JSS in this renovation process. LSDSP has among its priorities the increase of membership, which currently is around 2.000 (an average number in Latvia).

On the contents, LSDSP has recently adopted a new political platform for the party and is very eager to cooperate with PES member parties on this.

Concerning ethnic diversity, LSDSP claims to have an ethnically diverse membership, but most leaders are nevertheless Latvians. There say they are ready to cooperate with the Concord Centre but reluctantly. They regard the Concord Centre as a pressure group for the Russian minority

The delegation met with a delegation of the party leadership, led by the leader Janis Dinevics and Dainis Ivans.

4. Concord center

The **Concord Centre** (Latvian: *Saskaņas Centrs*, Russian *Центр согласия*, originally translated as Harmony Center) is a Russian community based alliance formed in 2005. Its main member parties are National Harmony Party (PHP), Latvian Socialist Party (PCTVL), Daugavpils City Party (DPP) and "New Centre".

The chair since autumn 2005 is journalist Nils Ušakovs (the first chairman was Riga city councillor and head of NC Sergejs Dolgopolovs). At the October 2006 elections, the party won 17 of 100 seats. It became the fourth largest party in Parliament and the second largest opposition party.

The parties of the alliance are starting a merging process. We were told that the Latvian Socialist Party (PCTVL), led by Alfrēds Rubiks, the last leader of the Communist Party of Latvia in 1991, would not be part of the merge.



The party seemed to be well organised and present all over the country. It claims to have social-democratic values and principles

Originally the party was created as a multiethnic based coalition, appealing to all the voters. The impression is that today, if it still is the most multi-ethnic party, it has refocused on the Russian community. Several Latvian social-democrats who had joined the Concord Centre at its creation recently left claiming that the Concord centre was multiethnic in words but not in practice, that the leadership was predominantly Russian and that the political messages were directed to the Russian community (refusal of some Leaders to recognise the Russian occupation).

They say they are ready to cooperate with LSDSP but not on citizenship issues. They regard LSDSP as quite nationalist.

The delegation met with a delegation led by International Secretary Boriss Cilevics and composed of representatives from PHP, DPP and New Centre.

6. Conclusions

The delegation came to the following operational recommendations to the PES Presidency and Coordination Team :

- strengthen the support to PES member party LSDSP which is undergoing a deep process of renovation
- maintain close contacts with PHP/Concord Center (including permanent invitations to meetings) but postpone decision on membership until the Latvian political scene is clearer.
- recommend the same decision to be taken by the Socialist International
- encourage the development of a strong social-democratic multi-ethnic movement in Latvia, notably through strong cooperation between LSDSP & PHP/Concord and by promoting social-democratic ideas among public opinion through various means.

The delegation will also suggest further actions to :

- European social-democratic political foundations, which could play an increased role in training and developing debates on social-democracy
- SAMAK on regional cooperation
- IDEA on the question of public party financing

The PES Presidency on the 14 of June 2007 agreed on following these recommendations.

Thanks to the European Forum for providing us with some relevant background information.

Programme of the PES Study Visit to Latvia

Tuesday 29.05.2007

Arrival of participants

- 13.00 Gathering of participants and lunch
- 14.30 Meeting with Mr. Maris Graudins
Head, European Parliament Information Office in Riga
- 15:30 Meeting with Mrs. Zaneta Ozolina
Head of Department of Political Science,
Director of Advanced Institute of Social and Political Research, University Latvia
- 16:30 Meeting with PHP (Harmony party) and Concord Centre (CC)
- Janis Urbanovics MP, chairman of PHP, chairman of the CC parliamentary faction
- Aivars Datavs, deputy secretary general of PHP, secretary general of CC
- Boriss Cilevics MP, international secretary of PHP, bureau member of CC
- Sergejs Mirskis MP, bureau member of PHP
- Stefanija Grapa Coordinator of Riga branch
- Janis Tutins, Coordinator of Latgale branch, MP
- Valerijs Ageshins MP, leader of the Kurzeme branch of PHP and Kurzeme branch of CC
- Svetlana Savicka, leader of the PHP youth organization
- Ivans Ribakovs MP, secretary general of PHP
- Anita Jakobson, Vice – Chair, Bureau member of New Center, Deputy director of the State employment agency in charge of European Social Fund
- Victor Gluhovs, Bureau Member of New Center, Vice chair Education committee, Riga city council
- Aleksejs Vidavskis, Chairman Daugavpils City Party, MP
- 20:00 Informal dinner hosted by Friedrich Ebert Foundation
- Dr. Elmar Römpczyk, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, Representative Baltic Countries
 - Dr. Atis Lejins, Director, Researcher, The Latvian Institute of International Affairs (LIIA),
 - Ivars Indans, Political Scientist
 - Dr. Andris Spruds, Professor for Political Sciences, The Latvian Institute of International Affairs (LIIA); Stradina University
 - Iveta Flesnere, Free Trade Union Confederation of Latvia, Youth council, Chairwoman
 - Dr. Dzintra Bungas, Researcher, The Latvian Institute of International Affairs (LIIA)
 - Dr. Daina Bara, Associate professor, University of Latvia, Faculty of Social Sciences
 - Dr. Martin Grahl, Pastor Riga's Protestant Church

Wednesday 30.05.2007

- 11:00 Meeting with LSPSD
- Dainis Ivans, Vice Chair
 - Ervins Labanovskis, International Secretary
 - Ansis Dobelis, Party bureau member
 - Arthurs Gothards, President, JSS (youth branch LSPSD)
- 12.30 Lunch with LSPSD
- Janis Dinevichs, Chairman
- 15:00 Debriefing

