Analyses OSW

CENTRE FOR EASTERN STUDIES 27.07.2011 www.osw.waw.pl

Latvia's inhabitants dissolve the parliament

On 23 July Latvia's inhabitants voted in a referendum for the dissolution of parliament. On 17 September early parliamentary elections will be held. Latvian society is disappointed with the political elite, perceived as corrupt and caring only for its particular interests. Good election results may be obtained by the new centre party, established by the former president Valdis Zatlers who in the last days of his tenure made a decision to organise the referendum and called for the fight against corruption and the influence of oligarchs.

Nearly 45% of citizens entitled to vote took part in the referendum and 94% of them voted for the dissolution of parliament. President Valdis Zatlers towards the end of his tenure for the first time in Latvia's history used the constitutional right of the head of state to organise a referendum regarding early parliamentary elections. He justified his decision, announced on 28 May, by the lack of measures taken by parliament in order to prevent oligarchs from appropriating the country and spreading corruption.

As the political parties represented in parliament elected nearly a year ago expected the referendum's result they did not made an appeal to voters to vote against the dissolution of parliament. The largest parties believe they will obtain seats in the parliament again.

Despite the disillusionment with the political elite voters mostly do not see an alternative to the present ruling class. This mainly stems from the polarisation of the political scene where one of the most important criteria of division remains the ethnic factor (Russian-speaking voters vote for the “Russian” parties and Latvians, who fear the takeover of power by these parties, opt for “Latvian” parties). Zatlers's Reform Party (Zatlera reformu partija), formed in July and taking advantage of the novelty effect as well as its leader's popularity and socially popular slogans of combating corruption and oligarchs, can count on support from part of centre-right voters and, according to recent surveys, it will be one of the largest parties in the new parliament. <pas>