Analyses OSW

CENTRE FOR EASTERN STUDIES 16.06.2010 www.osw.waw.pl

Latvia: Oligarchs join forces before the election

On 12 June in Riga a foundation congress of the union For a Better Latvia was held. The union is made up of parties run by Latvian oligarchs and a host of business people that support them. The reason behind the establishment of a new coalition is the poor results of these parties, blamed to a large degree by society on Latvia's economic crisis. The new name and populist slogans backed by strong financial and media resources will probably allow the unpopular new parties of oligarchs to maintain representation in parliament after the parliamentary election scheduled for 2 October 2010.

The leadership of For a Better Latvia is made up of leaders of parliamentary groups now in opposition - Andris Skele and Ainars Slesers – both Latvian oligarchs that in common opinion skillfully use political power to build and protect their own interests. Their parties in former years continuously had seats in parliament and many times were part of ruling coalitions. Support for the parties of Skele and Slesers fell considerably due to the recession and currently both parties would not pass the 5% threshold. Additionally, there are a few businessmen in the leadership of For a Better Latvia, among them the president of the gas company Itera Latvija Juris Savickis and representatives of three local parties. Guntis Ulmanis became the president of the coalition. Ulmanis is a former president of Latvia; for more than a decade he has not participated in the political life of the country.

The new leader and the new name are intended to secure “oligarchs and businessmen” seats in parliament, in the election to be held at the beginning of October, where they will be ready for cooperation with both the centre-right Unity and the Harmony Centre backed by the Russian minority – the parties that are currently leading in opinion polls. <pas>