

**Latvian Naturalization Project
A Project of Freedom House**

**Associate Cooperative Agreement No. DGS-A-00-99-00006-00
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**Eighth Interim Narrative Report
Reporting Period: January – March 2001**

I. Executive Summary

On March 15, 1999, USAID-Latvia awarded a grant in the amount of \$500,000 to Freedom House to sponsor the Latvian Naturalization Project. In December 1999, USAID increased the grant award by an additional \$95,195 to support the development of a fast-track language training program to prepare applicants for the naturalization exam. Freedom House has requested a no-cost extension to implement activities through September 2001.

The Latvian Naturalization Project is designed to strengthen the rule of law and human rights by supporting the implementation of amendments to Latvia's Citizenship Law. The 1998 amendments to the law liberalize the naturalization process as a means of integrating Latvia's 28 percent minority resident population. Through the USAID Latvian Naturalization Project, Freedom House provides technical assistance, training, and support to the Latvian Naturalization Board (LNB) and its Information Centers (ICs) to strengthen outreach to non-citizens and motivate them to apply for citizenship. With the supplemental funding, the project supports language training for citizenship applicants. Since the program aims to raise public awareness of legal rights and responsibilities, instill confidence in the naturalization process, and stimulate public demand for equal treatment under the law, its fundamental goal is to increase access to justice for both citizens and non-citizens of Latvia.

During the grant period, Freedom House has sponsored a variety of program activities designed to meet these goals. The IC became a new arm of LNB in 1999. Freedom House has devoted project support to developing the center, its staff, and its public relations and community outreach work. Freedom House has also supported the involvement of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and other partners in collaborative projects with the LNB to achieve the program objectives. The program activities have included: (1) institutional capacity building of the IC through strategic planning, training, and on-site technical assistance; (2) strengthening community outreach and public relations through on-site technical assistance, training, and grants; and (3) support for exam preparation training programs through the design of training curricula and training of trainers.

This narrative report reviews the activity carried out during the eighth interim reporting period of January 1 through March 31, 2001.

II. Project Activities this Quarter

In response to requests by the LNB and the US Embassy in Riga, Freedom House is currently assisting the LNB in the design, development, implementation, and management of a nationwide, multi-dimensional public relations/media campaign to promote citizenship in Latvia among the Russian minority. This media campaign will be the largest undertaking by the LNB to date, as donors have agreed to provide up to \$200,000 for the initiative. Freedom House played a critical role with the LNB in helping to achieve consensus among local partners and the international donor community on the goals, strategies, and approaches for the campaign, significantly increasing the pace of the initiative's start-up. In this capacity, Freedom House's ongoing involvement will contribute to the campaign's immediate implementation.

From March 23 to April 6, Freedom House deployed a consultant, former FH executive director, Jim Denton, to Riga to work with the LNB and the donor community, including the American Embassy, the UNDP, and the OSCE, to coordinate the campaign's development and to draft the tender for the "Citizenship Campaign." The tenders will be launched at the end of April. The Citizenship Campaign is intended to achieve two basic objectives: to raise public awareness about the citizenship issue in Latvia and, secondly, to motivate non-citizens in Latvia to apply for citizenship. The campaign will be organized and conducted in Latvia by a public relations firm, selected competitively through this tender process.

Freedom House's consultant assisted the LNB in writing a draft tender that presents the project objectives and guidelines. The tender is designed to stimulate good ideas to ensure that high-quality and relevant proposals are received. In addition to the formulation of the tender, Freedom House spent considerable effort coordinating, educating, and gently negotiating with the various players at LNB and in the donor community to move the process forward and to adopt a final draft of the tender. Their varying perspectives and levels of knowledge of (and confidence in) the tender process and even the overall Citizenship Campaign concept produced slightly different objectives, approaches, concerns, and priorities regarding aspects of the campaign. While these differences were not completely eliminated, the LNB and the donors reached a sufficient degree of consensus that allows the program to go forward smoothly.

The tender is a 13-page document, which includes all of the relevant sections, including background information, criteria, guidelines, and the proposal and budget format. The tender draws heavily on a very recently released report, "Toward Civil Society 2001," published by The Baltic Institute of Social Sciences. This report, as well as several others, was useful in shaping the tender and molding the various views represented by LNB and the donors. The information contained in the report offers important current insights into the mindset of the various constituencies within the citizen and non-citizen communities of Latvia. This data is essential in guiding the tender's readers toward

strategies, target groups, and messages that will most likely achieve the objectives to motivate large numbers of Latvian non-citizens to apply for citizenship.

In addition to providing technical assistance on the national Citizenship Campaign, Freedom House staff has actively engaged in conversations with representatives of the US Embassy in Riga and the LNB, as well as coordinated with State Department staff in the Northern European Initiative (NEI) department, to reach consensus on the U.S. government's strategic participation in the Latvian citizenship issue. Freedom House has also discussed with the NEI department the expanding the impact of the Latvian Naturalization Project to other Baltic states through regional programming. Freedom House has proposed and negotiated several project concepts in the form of concept papers and these have been circulated and discussed with all relevant parties. Currently, Freedom House is preparing a concept paper for funding consideration which would host Russian journalists on study visits to the Baltic States to get an in-depth look at minority rights and citizenship, including how the governments have adopted measures to facilitate rights through citizenship.

Freedom House requested a no-cost extension until September 2001 to complete the activities.

Activities for the Next Quarter

During the next quarter, Freedom House will assist in two subsequent stages of the national citizenship campaign: a bidder's conference and the selection/negotiation period for the tender award. The bidder's conference will take place on May 14 – 15, 2001. The conference will be a public meeting to describe the tender and answers questions by prospective bidders. It will also serve as an additional opportunity to bring the donors and the LNB together to discuss the initiative and to raise additional resources to fund the tender activities.

Later in June, a Freedom House consultant or staff member will return to Latvia to support the selection process, review the applications/bids, manage the process with donors, interview finalists, conduct final negotiations with bidders, and assist in the hiring of a Latvian coordinator in Riga to oversee the year long campaign. Freedom House will provide the oversight and reporting to the US government on this component of the program as well as partial funding of the tender award.

As these are critical moments in the process, differences between the LNB and the donors could reemerge in such a way that could damage or postpone the project significantly. An informed, experienced, and trusted advisor, as that offered by Freedom House, will play an important role at these intervals to keep the process moving forward. Through a professional national campaign, citizenship will stay at the forefront of policy initiatives as well as encourage and promote integration and equal rights for the large non-citizenship community throughout Latvia.