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### **Improving Political Accountability in Latvia**

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#### **Abstract**

The research assesses the effectiveness of accountability measures in Latvia. The positive side of the balance sheet of developments between fall 2004 and summer 2005 shows: the Corruption Prevention and Combatting Bureau has been working increasingly effectively; the new Administrative Code and Courts allow citizens to demand accountability of public officials; a new director is reforming the State Audit Office; and a new law did limit the impact of big money on municipal elections. Civic activism has influenced high-profile political appointments, such as the re-appointment of General Procurator Janis Maizitis who has streamlined the procuracy and is investigating high-profile cases that could bring a breakthrough in the accountability climate.

The performance of judges remains a weak link in the justice system, and so is the implementation of many regulations that are designed to prevent corruption, for example in procurement. Many reform proposals are on hold. Several vote-buying scandals during municipal elections are a dangerous omen for the parliamentary elections in 2006. Political oligarchs are mobilizing for those elections by forming new parties and trying to capture more media.

This research analyzes the means and progress of political accountability in Latvia, with an emphasis on the containment of corruption: how has accountability worked so far, what has hindered it, and what strategies could help in promoting change.

The various dimensions of accountability include electoral, public, legal, financial, and other aspects. Effective accountability can be measured by electoral upsets, resignations of officials,

the impact of media reporting and parliamentary hearings, reversals of shady deals, and the rate of corruption investigations and convictions. The project takes a multi-dimensional approach to assessing the effectiveness of accountability measures and outlines a balance sheet of developments between fall 2004 and summer 2005. Each section starts by listing accomplishments, and then discusses remaining issues.