



Executive summary of public audit report

ORGANIZATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF ELECTIONS

22 November 2013, No. VA-P-10-1-18

Full audit report in Lithuanian is available on the website
of the National Audit Office: www.vkontrole.lt

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Elections are the most important form of citizens' participation in the management of the state and expression of the supreme sovereign power of the nation.

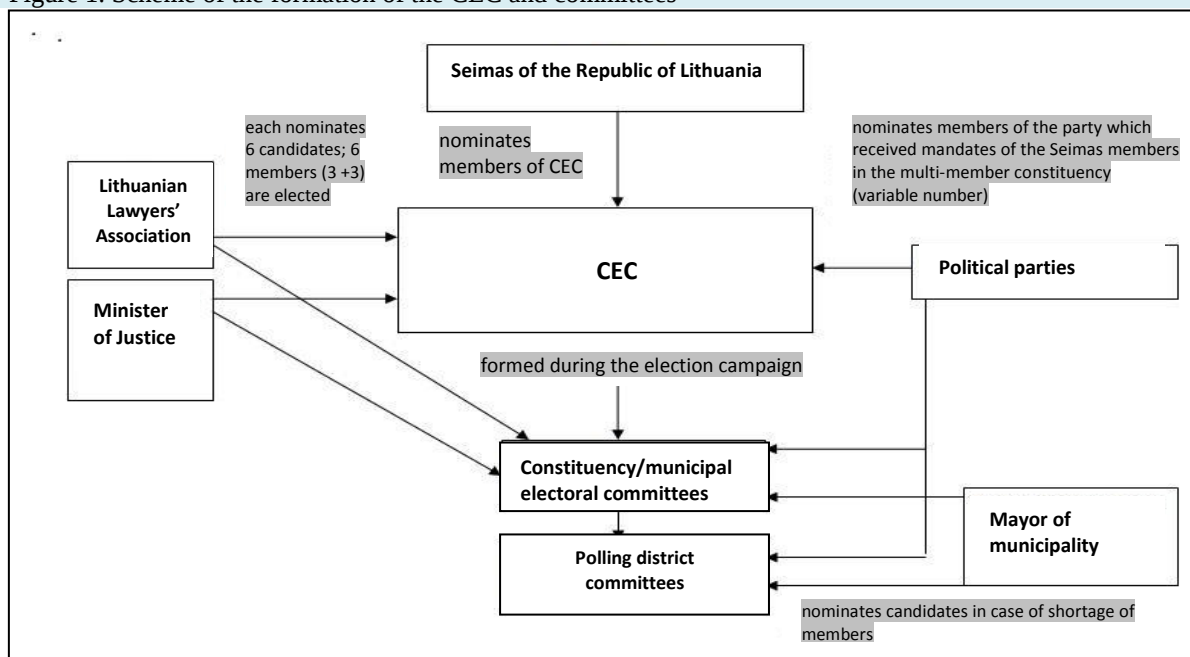
In 2012, the amount of about LTL 23 million was allocated from the state budget for the programme "Organization and implementation of elections" carried out by the Central Electoral Commission with a view to organizing and conducting elections and referenda. The following key tasks were set to the Commission when implementing the said programme: to organize and conduct elections to the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania, to the office of the President of the Republic of Lithuania, to Municipal Councils, to the European Parliament, and referenda and to ensure that the elections and referenda are conducted observing the principles of democratic elections laid down in the Constitution and legislation of the Republic of Lithuania.

Elections and referenda are organised and conducted by:

- Central Electoral Commission;
- constituency electoral committees, which are formed by the Central Electoral Commission for the period of elections;
- polling district committees, which are formed by constituency electoral committees for the period of elections.

The Central Electoral Commission (CEC) is formed for a four-year period in advance of regular elections to the Seimas. The Central Electoral Commission has to be formed anew no later than 120 days and no earlier than 140 days prior to regular elections. The Commission is composed of the Chair of the Commission and representatives of parties, political organizations which have received mandates of the Seimas members in the multi-member constituency, persons with university law degrees nominated by the Minister of Justice and by the Lithuanian Lawyers' Association (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Scheme of the formation of the CEC and committees



Source: National Audit Office

After the elections, the composition of the Commission is adjusted to reflect the composition of the Seimas. No later than within 100 days after the first sitting of the newly elected Seimas, the Seimas dismisses and newly appoints members nominated by the parties so that representatives of the parties (coalitions) which have received the mandates of the Seimas members in the multi-member constituency are present in the Commission. There were 16 members in the Central Electoral Commission on 1 October 2013,

There are still long queues of voters during elections and a lack of polling booths. Information systems did not function in some polling district during the 2012 elections to the Seimas, voting results were delayed in large districts. Therefore, it is important that the forthcoming elections are organized more efficiently.

The audit objective was to evaluate the organization and implementation of elections and to see whether elections could be conducted more effectively, addressing the following issues:

- ensuring of the same value of votes;
- preparation of the committee members and observers;
- possibilities to reduce costs of the distribution of poll cards;
- possibilities to reduce voters' queues during elections;
- possibilities to receive voting results in a prompt manner.

This audit did not assess matters of political advertising, election campaign and possible voter bribery.

The audit was included in the 2013 Public Audit Programme on a proposal from the Audit Committee of the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania.

The auditee was the Central Electoral Commission.

The period under audit – 2008–2012. The analysis of trends and developments also used data of earlier periods. The audit assessed data of the Seimas, municipal councils, and presidential elections. Information and evidence was obtained from the Central Electoral Commission, municipalities, committees, and members of the Seimas.

The following public audit conclusions and recommendations were drawn upon the assessment of the audit findings.

CONCLUSIONS

1. The formation of the Central Electoral Commission is not rational because:
 - 1.1. the period of 120–140 days before elections to the Seimas is too short to ensure adequate training of new members of the CEC;
 - 1.2. the composition of the CEC is partly changed after the elections to the Seimas as a result of changes in the parties (coalitions) which have received the mandates of the Seimas members in the multi-member constituency. This incurs additional costs related to the payment of severance benefits to the dismissed CEC members.
2. Election constituencies by the number of voters are distributed unevenly. The number of voters in the elections to the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania in the largest and smallest constituencies (single-member) differs almost twice and this difference tends to increase, which determines different values of votes.
3. The number of committee members is not linked with the number of registered voters in districts, so they have different workloads, which affects the time of the presentation of voting results.

4. Committee members and observers do not receive adequate training for elections, their training is incomplete, so they are not always properly prepared for work during elections.
5. The production and delivery of poll cards is inappropriate because this card basically performs the function of notification of the voter (of the venue, time of the forthcoming elections and other related information), which is also served by other means (information notifications through the media, received by mail, etc.). In addition, delivery of poll cards to voters has no major impact on voter turnout, however, it requires significant human, time and financial resources.
6. In the 2012 elections to the Seimas, a large number of polling district committees did not use information subsystems in the first election round: ABRIS (48.6 percent of the districts), ADV (8.4 percent of the districts), so voters in these districts could have experienced inconveniences when voting at another polling district than at their prescribed ones; also, presentation of the voting results required more time.
7. The number of polling booths in districts is disproportionate compared to the number of voters; also, the number of ballot papers filled out during elections was not taken into account, which determined long voter queues in districts with more than 2500 voters.
8. The Central Electoral Commission does not have an approved standard procedure for the preparation of polling booths, which are different in certain polling districts and some booths cannot ensure complete secrecy of voting.

RECOMMENDATIONS

No recommendation is issued concerning amendment of the time of the formation of the Commission given the fact that on 12 November 2013 the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania passed the Law amending Articles 3, 6, 7, 10, 11, 13, 14, 17 and repealing Article 9 of the Law on the Central Electoral Commission, which set forth that the Commission shall be formed no earlier than 140 days and no later than 200 days after regular or early elections to the Seimas.

To the Central Electoral Commission

1. With a view to ensuring the same value of votes, to draft legislation and to propose to the Seimas to set lower deviation of the number of voters in single-member constituencies (10 percent) from the average number of voters in the constituency.
2. To reduce the established maximum size of the electoral district and to link the number of committee members with the number of registered voters in the district.
3. Aiming at better preparation of members of constituency electoral committees and polling district committees for elections and referenda, to draft a procedure for the training of committee members and observers.

4. To develop a plan providing for measures for gradual shift from the distribution of poll cards to other more cost-effective ways of voter notification; in case of early voting poll cards should be received (printed) in voting stations.
5. With a view to reducing voters' queues, to set the number of polling booths in proportion to the number of voters in districts, taking into account the number of ballot papers to be filled out and the average time needed to fill them out.
6. With a view to achieving prompt disposal of voting information, to ensure full use (100 percent) of information subsystems ABRIS and ADV and transmission of results by these subsystems.
7. With a view to ensuring secret ballot, to approve requirements for the preparation of polling booths and/or organise centralised procurement thereof.