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U.S. Department of State

Lithuania Country Report on Human Rights Practices for 1997

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LITHUANIA

Lithuania is a parliamentary democracy, having regained its independence in 1990 after more than 50 years of forced annexation by the Soviet Union. The Constitution, adopted by referendum in 1992, established a 141-member unicameral legislature, the Seimas; a directly elected president, who functions as Head of State; and a government formed by a prime minister and other ministers, appointed by the President and approved by the Seimas. The Government exercises authority with the approval of the Seimas and the President. In fair elections in 1992, the Lithuanian Democratic Labor Party (LDDP)--the successor to the Communist Party of Lithuania, which in 1989 broke away from the Soviet Communist Party--won a majority of parliamentary seats and formed the Government. In 1993 voters elected Algirdas Brazauskas, then Chairman of the LDDP, as President. The Conservatives prevailed in the October and November parliamentary elections, followed by the Christian Democrats. The two parties formed a coalition government (the first in Lithuania's history).

A unified national police force under the jurisdiction of the Interior Ministry is responsible for law enforcement. The State Security Department is responsible for internal security and reports to Parliament and the President. The police committed a number of human rights abuses.

Since independence, Lithuania has made steady progress in developing a market economy. Over 40 percent of state property, in addition to most housing and small businesses, has been privatized. Trade is diversifying, and expanding both to the West and the East. The largest number of residents are employed in agriculture (21.7 percent), followed by industrial enterprises (20.7 percent, including electricity, gas, and water supply) and wholesale and retail trade (16 percent). About 33.3 percent of those employed

work for state enterprises, while 66.7 percent are employed by private companies. The agricultural sector's high proportion of the work force reflects a lack of efficient consolidation of small private farms and represents a vocal protectionist current in economic policy debate. The banking system remains weak, but laws on banking control and supervision are in place and a number of large private banks are undergoing outside audits. The inflation rate for the first half of 1997 was 4.8 percent, compared with an annual rate of 13.1 percent for 1996. Per capita gross domestic product for the first half of 1997 was estimated at \$1,200 (4,800 litas) and unemployment at mid-year was 5.3 percent. The balance of trade remains negative due to imports of gas and other energy products from Russia. Major exports include textile and knitwear products, timber and furniture, electronic goods, food, and chemical and petroleum products.

The Government generally respects the human rights of its citizens, but problems remain in some areas. Police on occasion beat detainees and abuse detention laws. The Government is making some progress in bringing police corruption under control. Prison conditions remain poor.

The police investigated the desecration of one Jewish site and one Polish site but identified no suspects. State media continues to be subject to political interests. Violence and discrimination against women and child abuse are serious problems.

RESPECT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

Section 1 Respect for the Integrity of the Person, Including Freedom From:

a. Political and Other Extrajudicial Killing

There were no reports of political or other extrajudicial killings.

b. Disappearance

There were no reports of politically motivated disappearances. There is a problem, however, of women who have been forced or willingly sold into prostitution by organized crime figures (see Section 5). Their families, unaware of the situation, claim that they have disappeared or have been kidnapped.

c. Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment

The Constitution specifically forbids torture, and there were no reports of its use. However, police sometimes beat or otherwise physically mistreated detainees. The local press reported that incidents of police brutality are becoming more common. In many instances, the victims reportedly are reluctant to bring charges against police officers for fear of reprisals. A total of 85 officers were dismissed for illegal or fraudulent activities in the first 6 months of 1997 for a variety of offenses, including 41 persons convicted of committing crimes. The Interior Ministry states that district police inspectors are the most negligent in the force. To strengthen the integrity of the police, the Inspectorate General of the interior ministry was given administrative autonomy in May.

Human rights violations committed by noncommissioned military personnel continue, despite efforts to quash criminal bullying--a practice inherited from the former Soviet armed forces. However, such violations decreased compared with 1996, when there were 121 incidents and 10 legal cases were brought. In the first six months of 1997, 29 incidents were reported with four cases filed. According to the ministry of national defense most trauma inflicted on conscripts is psychological rather than physical: there were four cases of assault, one case of a broken cheekbone and one concussion recorded

in 1996 and in the first half of 1997 there were two cases of assault, two cases of broken bones, and one concussion. The Ministry believes that a lack of professionalism among noncommissioned officers--rather than ethnic, regional, or social factors--is a primary factor in cases of hazing, and it is working actively to improve the skills and judgment of such officers.

Prison conditions are poor. Due to limited resources, most prisons are overcrowded and poorly maintained. Prisoners on death row or serving life sentences are required to wear special striped uniforms. Human rights monitors are permitted to visit prisons.

d. Arbitrary Arrest, Detention, or Exile

Except in cases that come under provisions of the Preventive Detention Law (described below), police may detain a person for up to 72 hours based upon reliable evidence of criminal activity. Under a law passed in June, a judge must also approve the detention. At the end of that period, police must decide whether or not to make a formal arrest, and a magistrate must approve an arrest warrant. The authorities have a total of 10 days to present supporting evidence. Once a suspect is formally charged, prosecutors may keep the suspect under investigative arrest for up to 2 months before taking the suspect to court. In exceptional cases, investigative arrest may be extended by a further 6 to 9 months with the written approval of the Prosecutor General. The Constitution provides for the right to an attorney from the moment of detention.

In an effort to cope with the rise in violent organized crime, in 1993 Parliament passed the Preventive Detention Law pertaining to persons suspected of being violent criminals. The law, which was passed as a temporary measure and lasted until 1997, allowed police, but not the internal security and armed forces, to detain suspected violent criminals for up to 2 months rather than only for the standard 72-hour period. The effect of the law is to give prosecutors and investigators additional time to conduct an investigation and file formal criminal charges against the detainee. Those apprehended must be released after 2 months if an investigation does not lead to formal charges. Local police commissioners must obtain the Prosecutor General's approval of each arrest carried out under the provisions of this law. In the first six months of the year, 303 people were detained pursuant to this law compared with over 338 for all of 1996. Of the 303, 185 were released after 2 months, as their guilt had not been proven.

The Parliament voted in December 1995 to extend this law for an additional year, maintaining provisions carried over from 1995 modifications, including checks on prosecutorial abuse. The law requires that a detainee must be informed within 3 hours following arrest about the length of the preventive detention being considered (not to exceed 2 months), and must be brought before a court within 48 hours of arrest for a ruling on the legality of the detention. Furthermore, a detainee has the legal right to consult with an attorney during the period of detention. The law gives law enforcement officials wide latitude in making arrest decisions and may be open to abuse. Parliamentarians who voted against the extension stated that preventive detention was not in keeping with the Constitution and the European Convention on Basic Human Rights and Freedoms. The Prosecutor General, however, reported that although a drastic measure, it is effective. In several well-publicized cases, the law helped to convict and sentence dangerous criminals to lengthy prison terms. In many other instances, however, the suspects were freed without charge after expiration of the maximum detention period, leading some observers to believe that the police are abusing the length of the detention period provided by this law.

There is no provision for exile, nor is it practiced.

e. Denial of Fair Public Trial

The Constitution provides for an independent judiciary, and the judiciary is independent in practice.

Efforts continued in 1996 to reform legal codes imposed during the Soviet era. Parliament passed new civil and criminal procedure codes as well as a Court Reform Law in 1995. The judicial system presently consists of a two-tier structure of district courts and a Supreme Court, which is an appellate court. There is also a Constitutional Court. Court decisions are arrived at independently. The Prosecutor General exercises an oversight responsibility through a network of district prosecutors who work with police investigators--employed by the Ministry of the Interior--in preparing the prosecution's evidence for the courts. The institution of lay assessors was abolished at the end of 1994.

Under the provisions of the Court Reform Law, two new kinds of courts were created. Local district courts were set up below the present district courts to handle cases at the municipal level, while a new appellate court level hears appeals arising from district court decisions, thereby reducing the case load of the overburdened Supreme Court. In addition a commercial court is in operation through the district courts.

An arbitration system is pending. In addition, as a result of accession to the Council of Europe, the Ministry of Justice has begun a thorough review of Lithuania's laws with a view towards bringing them into accord with the provisions of the European Convention on Human Rights.

The Constitution provides defendants with the right to counsel. In practice the right to legal counsel is abridged by the shortage of trained advocates who find it difficult to cope with the burgeoning numbers of criminal cases brought before the courts. Outside observers have recommended the establishment of a public defender system to regularize procedures for provision of legal assistance to indigent persons charged in criminal cases. By law defense advocates have access to government evidence and may present evidence and witnesses. The courts and law enforcement agencies generally honor routine, written requests for evidence.

Government rehabilitation of over 50,000 persons charged with anti-Soviet crimes during the Stalin era led to reports in 1991 that some people alleged to have been involved with crimes against humanity during the Nazi occupation had benefited from this rehabilitation. A special judicial procedure was established to examine each case in which an individual or organization raised an objection that a rehabilitated person may have committed a crime against humanity. In 1994 the Supreme Court overturned the rehabilitation of three persons whose cases were pending from 1993; there have been no such rulings by the Supreme Court since that time, although preparations to establish a legal procedure for regulating the annulment of rehabilitation are under way.

Formal charges have yet to be brought against Aleksandras Lileikis, an alleged war criminal. After being stripped of his U.S. citizenship in May 1996 for concealing his World War II activities, that allegedly included acts of genocide when he headed the security police of the Vilnius district under Nazi control, Lileikis returned to Lithuania. Prosecutor General Kazys Pednycia actively investigated the case after his appointment in February, and was prepared to prosecute Lileikis by the end of June. However, the law stipulates that the accused cannot be prosecuted if his medical condition is poor. At 90 years of age, Lileikis is not healthy. Given the scope of his alleged crimes, however, the Government and Parliament sought mechanisms to allow prosecution to proceed. Legislation allowing a case to be presented through the defense attorney to the accused unanimously passed the Seimas on December 23. The prosecution of Aleksandras Lileikis is expected to proceed in January 1998.

There were no reports of political prisoners.

f. Arbitrary Interference With Privacy, Family, Home, or Correspondence

The Constitution provides for the right to privacy. The authorities do not engage in indiscriminate or widespread monitoring of the correspondence or communications of citizens. With the written authorization of a prosecutor or judge, however, police and the security service may engage in surveillance and monitoring activities on grounds of national security. Except in cases of hot pursuit or the danger of disappearance of evidence, police must obtain a search warrant signed by a prosecutor before they may enter private premises.

It is widely assumed, however, that law enforcement agencies have increased the use of a range of surveillance methods to cope with the expansion of organized crime. There is some question as to the legal basis of this police surveillance, but there are no known legal challenges to such surveillance.

Section 2 Respect for Civil Liberties, Including:

a. Freedom of Speech and Press

The Constitution provides for freedom of speech and of the press. The Government generally respects these rights in practice.

Prior restraint over either print or broadcast media and restrictions on disclosure are prohibited, unless the Government determines that national security is involved) The Parliament adopted its long-awaited media law in July, after a draft public information law failed to pass in November 1995 because most independent news publications and many prominent journalists protested that it was too restrictive. The new media law introduced an element of self-regulation but postponed a difficult decision on television advertising. Under the new law, the media are to create a special ethics commission and ombudsman to check libel cases and other complaints. The final version of the law allows reporting on the private lives of officials as long as the information affects the welfare of the people.

The independent print media has flourished since independence, including a wide range of economic newspapers and specialty magazines. Officially there are over 2,000 newspapers and magazines registered, but only a fraction are still published.

Many investigative journalists covering organized crime were harassed by and received death threats from organized "crime families."

State radio and five private radio stations broadcast throughout the country. In addition to state television, which is in the process of being transformed into public television, three private television stations also broadcast regular programming nationwide. Additional radio and television stations, including a Polish-language radio station in the Vilnius region, are found throughout the country in population centers.

There are no restrictions on academic freedom.

b. Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and Association

The Constitution provides for these rights, and the Government respects them in practice.

The Communist Party of Lithuania and other organizations associated with the Soviet regime continue to be banned.

c. Freedom of Religion

The Constitution provides for religious freedom, and the Government generally respects this provision in practice. The Law on Religious Communities and Associations was passed in October 1995. It grants religious communities, associations, and centers property rights to prayer houses, homes, and other buildings and permits construction necessary for their activities. Article 5 of this law mentions nine religious communities that have been declared "traditional" by the law and therefore are eligible for governmental assistance: Latin Rite Catholics, Greek Rite Catholics, Evangelical Lutherans, Evangelical Reformers, Orthodox, Old Believers, Jews, Sunni Muslims, and Karaites. There are no restrictions on the activities of other religious communities.

Relations between the Government and the officially registered Jewish community are good. However, the Hasidic Chabad Lubavich community is having difficulties registering as a traditional Jewish religion. The Ministry of Justice argues that the Chabad Lubavich is not a part of Lithuania's historical, spiritual, or social heritage and therefore cannot be registered as traditional (Article 5 of the Law on Religious Communities and Associations). The Ministry states that the Chabad Lubavich does not have a continuity of traditions and is a separate branch of Judaism than that followed by the traditional Lithuanian Jewish religious community. Furthermore, they state that the Hasidic movement only began in Lithuania in the 18th century and has been suspended twice. The Chabad Lubavich counter that the suspension of their activity during the war years and after was imposed by Nazi and Soviet occupiers. They also have protested the disassociation of the Hasidic movement from Judaism. The Chabad Lubavich continue to press for recognition as a traditional religion. They have been allowed to operate a kindergarten.

d. Freedom of Movement Within the Country, Foreign Travel, Emigration, and Repatriation

Under the law, citizens and permanent residents are permitted free movement within the country and the right to return to the country. There are no restrictions on foreign travel.

In January Lithuania ratified the 1951 Geneva Convention on the Status of Refugees or its 1967 Protocol. In July, the Law on Refugee Status came into effect, allowing for the first formal grant of refugee status to qualified applicants.

A growing number of economic migrants and refugees prompted the government to designate appropriate facilities for their use. A registration center for migrants and refugees is in the town of Pabrade, while a refugee reception center was opened during the year in the town of Rukla. The latter, which has approximately 50 residents, has facilities for integrating those persons granted refugee status into society. The Government seeks to deport those who remain at Pabrade--about 800 economic migrants largely from South Asia and China--but has difficulty doing so due to the high cost of such deportation and the lack of cooperation from the migrants' home countries. The Rukla facility is modern and has adequate facilities; at Pabrade, where conditions are very rudimentary and the housing is overcrowded, the migrants besieged the Lithuanian employees on two occasions during the year in protest. The Government has received some financial assistance from international refugee organizations to subsidize the repatriation of some refugees who returned voluntarily.

Lithuania continued its efforts to stem the tide of illegal migrants through negotiating readmission agreements with Russia and Belarus, the two countries used by most migrants to reach Lithuania. The Government cooperates with the office of the United National High Commissioner for Refugees and other humanitarian organizations in assisting refugees. The issue of the provision of first asylum did not arise in 1997. There were no reports of forced return of persons to a country where they feared

persecution.

Section 3 Respect for Political Rights: The Right of Citizens to Change Their Government

The Constitution provides citizens with the right to change their government peacefully, and citizens exercise this right in practice through periodic, free, and fair elections held on the basis of universal suffrage. Of 171 seats in the Seimas, 71 are elected directly and 70 are elected through proportional representation. Only those parties that receive more than 5 percent of the total ballots (or 7 percent for coalitions) are allowed representation in the Parliament. National minority slates had been exempt from this law in the past, but despite the 5 percent threshold ethnic Lithuanians, Poles, Russians, and Jews were all elected to the seimas in the fall 1996 parliamentary elections. The Citizenship Law, adopted in 1991 and amended in October 1995, is inclusive with regard to the country's ethnic minorities. The law provides citizenship to persons who were born within the borders of the Republic; who were citizens of Lithuania prior to 1940 and their descendants; or who became citizens under previous legal authority. More than 90 percent of Lithuania's ethnic Russian, Polish, Belarusian, and Ukrainian inhabitants received citizenship.

Qualification for naturalization of persons not covered by the above-mentioned categories requires a 10-year residency, a permanent job or source of income, knowledge of the Constitution, renunciation of any other citizenship, and proficiency in Lithuanian.

While there are no legal restrictions on women's participation in politics or government, they are underrepresented in political leadership positions. There are 24 female deputies and 2 female ministers in the 17-member Cabinet.

Section 4 Governmental Attitude Regarding International and Nongovernmental Investigation of Alleged Violations of Human Rights

Most government authorities cooperate with local nongovernmental organizations and actively encourage visits by international and nongovernmental human rights groups. A key exception is the Ministry of Interior, that has continually refused to release information on police brutality and statistics on corruption-related incidents. The Association for the Defense of Human Rights in Lithuania is an umbrella organization for several small human rights groups, all of which operate without government restriction. In 1994 the Government established the Department of International and Human Rights within the Ministry of Justice, which monitors law and legal practice to determine whether these are in accord with Lithuania's international obligations.

Section 5 Discrimination Based on Race, Sex, Religion, Disability, Language, or Social Status

The Constitution prohibits discrimination based on race, sex, religion, disability, or ethnic background. However, discrimination against women persists.

Women

Abuse of women at home is reportedly common, especially in connection with alcohol abuse by husbands, but institutional mechanisms for coping with this problem are only now being formed. A women's shelter funded in part with Norwegian assistance is now in operation. According to one sociological survey, 20 percent of women reported experiencing an attempted rape, while another 33 percent reported having been beaten at least once in their lives. The number of rapes reported in the first half of 1997 (88) is proportionally the same as the 168 rapes reported for all of 1996. Official statistics

on the incidence of abuse of women in the home are not filed separately from other categories of assault. Unlike in 1996 the Ministry of Interior did not provide statistics on the number of women killed due to arguments resulting from jealousy or domestic problems, although one of the most prominent victims of such a crime was the senior civil servant in the Ministry of Public Administration Reform and Municipal Affairs. Persons convicted of rape generally receive sentences of from 3 to 5 years in prison.

A number of women, some underage, have been enticed or forced and sold into prostitution abroad by organized crime figures. Some go consciously, hoping to become wealthy; others are lured by deceptive offers of seemingly innocent jobs as household helpers, bar dancers, or waitresses. Women are also tricked into prostitution through false marriage advertisements. Their families are often unaware of their predicament and believe that they have disappeared or been kidnaped. An official from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has stated that about 99 percent of women who have been reported missing are actually working as prostitutes abroad.

The Constitution provides for equal rights for men and women, and official policy specifies equal pay for equal work. Generally, men and women receive the same pay for comparable work, but women are significantly underrepresented in some professions and in the managerial sector as a whole. Significant inequalities in society based on gender continue, and there are still very conservative views about the role of women. The fact that women's enrollment now exceeds that of men in some university departments has prompted university administrators to introduce preferential entrance criteria for men to redress what is perceived as an abnormal state of affairs. Parliamentary deputies speaking about female deputies in public sometimes make unflattering comments based on gender stereotypes without eliciting any public reaction.

Children

The Ministries of Social Security and of the Interior share official responsibility for the protection of children's rights and welfare. Starting in 1994, the Children's Rights Service of the Ministry of Social Security has taken on many of the functions formerly handled by the Interior Ministry and its subordinate police officers throughout the country, thereby focusing more attention on the social welfare needs of children. There are 56 branches of the Children's Rights Protection Council throughout the country. This Council registers and cares for children in abusive and dysfunctional families, and had registered 30,000 children this year.

Child abuse is a problem. The press has been thorough in reporting increases in cruelty to children, including sexual abuse, intentional starvation, beatings, and murder. Authorities reported that 73 children were killed by their parents in 1996. No department or organization collects information on child abuse, however. Moreover, there are no specific criminal codes for child pornography, sexual abuse, or sex tourism. There is only one rehabilitation center in the country for children who have been sexually abused.

Social welfare workers believe that child abuse in connection with alcohol abuse by parents is a serious problem. Moreover, the prevalence of authoritarian values in family upbringing has discouraged more active measures against child abuse.

People With Disabilities

Legal provisions for access to buildings for people with disabilities are in place but are not widely enforced; the vast majority of public buildings remain inaccessible to such persons.

More than 350,000 people with disabilities live in Lithuania--10,000 of them children. The 1991 Law on Integrating Disabled People, provides for a broad category of rights and public benefits to which disabled people are legally entitled. The Parliament allotted \$10.5 million for persons with disabilities and has spent \$3.6 million as of September. A project in Kaunas to build an apartment building for persons with disabilities has not been completed. A center for deaf children has been created, as has a program for children with special orthopedic problems.

Religious Minorities

Jewish and Polish community leaders expressed their concern regarding desecration of cemeteries and monuments in each of their communities. In both cases, national and local authorities responded promptly. The desecrations were condemned by senior officials and investigated by the police; however, no suspects were identified and no charges were brought.

National/Racial/Ethnic Minorities

Minority ethnic groups--including Russians, Poles, Belarusians, Ukrainians, Tatars, and Karaites--comprise roughly 20 percent of the country's citizens. There were calls during the year, mostly from the Polish community, for the resignation of the Education Minister after he made public remarks that were interpreted to mean that foreign language instruction in schools would cease. The Government subsequently confirmed that there was no intention of ending current instruction in the languages of ethnic minorities.

Many nonethnic Lithuanian public sector employees were required to attain a functional knowledge of Lithuanian within several years, although the authorities have been granting liberal extensions of the time frame in which this is to be achieved. During the first 6 months of 1997, 2,484 persons applied for citizenship. Citizenship was granted to 952 of them, based in part on their Lithuanian language ability. There is no documented evidence of job dismissals based on the language law. The authorities have indicated that the intent of the law is to apply moral incentives to learn Lithuanian as the official language of the State; they have asserted that no one would be dismissed solely because of an inability to meet the language requirements.

In Vilnius, isolated attacks on foreigners--including French, Japanese and Kazak diplomats who in two cases required extensive medical treatment--have occurred throughout the year. Authorities have taken steps to curtail such attacks through an increased police presence.

Section 6 Worker Rights

a. The Right of Association

The Constitution and the 1991 Law on Trade Unions recognize the right of workers and employees to form and join trade unions. The Law on Trade Unions formally extends this right to employees of the police and the armed forces, although the Collective Agreements Law of 1991 does not allow collective bargaining by government employees involved in law enforcement and security related work. In 1990 the Lithuanian branch of the Soviet Union's All-Union Central Council of Trade Unions, including 23 of 25 trade unions, renamed itself the Confederation of Free Trade Unions (CFTU) and began asserting increased independence from its Soviet parent. In 1993 the CFTU joined eight other unions that also had been part of the All-Union Central Council to form the Lithuanian Trade Union Center (LTUC).

The Lithuanian Workers' Union (LWU) was formed in 1990 as an alternative to the CFTU. Unlike the

CFTU/LTUC, the LWU was an early supporter of Lithuanian independence from the Soviet Union and actively sought western free trade union contacts. The LWU claims a dues-paying membership of 78,000 organized in 35 regional groupings.

The Law on Trade Unions and the Constitution provide for the right to strike, although public officials providing essential services may not do so. Many workers threatened to strike because of low wages, but there were no major strikes in 1997.

There are no restrictions on unions affiliating with international trade unions.

b. The Right to Organize and Bargain Collectively

The Collective Agreements Law provides for collective bargaining and the right of unions to organize employees, although several provisions reportedly hinder the establishment of new union organizations. According to the law, unions, in order to be registered, must have at least 30 founding members in large enterprises or have a membership of one-fifth of all employees in small enterprises. Difficulties commonly arise in state enterprises in which employees are represented by more than one union. LWU officials charge that managers in some state enterprises discriminate against LWU organizers and have on occasion dismissed employees in retribution for their trade union activities. The LWU also charges that the judicial system is slow to respond to LWU grievances regarding dismissals from work. LWU representatives claim that state managers sometimes prefer the CFTU/LTUC over LWU unions as collective bargaining partners.

In general trade union spokesmen say that managers often determine wages without regard to trade union wishes, except in larger factories with well-organized trade unions. The Government issues periodic decrees that serve as guidelines for state enterprise management in setting wage scales. The LWU and the LTUC engage in direct collective bargaining over wages at the workplace level. Wage decisions are increasingly being made at the enterprise level, although government ministries still retain some control over this sphere in state-owned enterprises. The LWU reports that it supplements its bargaining efforts with active lobbying in government ministries that own enterprises. During the first 6 months of 1996 prices increased faster than the growth of wage increases, thereby reversing a process of real wage growth that had begun in 1993.

There are no export processing zones.

c. Prohibition of Forced or Compulsory Labor

The Constitution specifically prohibits forced labor by all, including children, and this prohibition is observed in practice. There are no reports that it occurred.

d. Status of Child Labor Practices and Minimum Age for Employment

The Constitution specifically prohibits forced and bonded labor by children, and this prohibition is observed in practice.

The legal minimum age for employment of children without parental consent is 16 years. The legal minimum age for employment is 16 years; with the written consent of parents, it is 14 years. Free trade union representatives assert that the mechanisms for monitoring minimum age legislation are rudimentary. Complaints about infringement of child labor regulations generally are referred to local prosecutors who investigate the charges and take legal action to stop violations. Available evidence

suggests that child labor is rare.

e. Acceptable Conditions of Work

The legal minimum wage was raised in 1997 from \$75 (300 litas) to \$100 (400 litas) per month. The minimum wage does not provide a decent standard of living for a worker and family. The average wage in the public sector is \$215 (861 litas) per month. The Council of Ministers and the Ministry of Social Security periodically adjust the minimum wage. Every 3 months these government bodies must submit their minimum wage proposals to the Seimas, which has the right to approve or revise the minimum wage level. Enforcement of the minimum wage is almost nonexistent, in part because the Government does not want to exacerbate unemployment. The 40-hour workweek is standard, with a provision for at least one 24-hour rest period. For a majority of the population, living standards remain low. The poorest households spend 66 percent of their income on food, compared 45 percent in wealthier households.

The Constitution provides that workers have the right to safe and healthy working conditions. In 1993 a Labor Safety Law went into effect, setting the rights of workers confronted with hazardous conditions and providing legal protection for workers who file complaints about such conditions. The State Labor Inspection Service, which the law established, is charged with implementing the Labor Safety Law. Regional labor inspection offices, each of which employs only two to three officials, are severely understaffed. They closed 40 enterprises or departments of enterprises found to be in violation of safety regulations during the first 6 months of this year. Unsafe conditions caused by worn, outdated industrial technologies are reportedly widespread, and 34 work-related deaths were recorded in the first six months of 1997 compared with 98 work-related deaths for all of 1996.

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