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U.S. Department of State

Lithuania Country Report on Human Rights Practices for 1998

Released by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, February 26, 1999.

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. The Conservatives prevailed in the 1996 parliamentary elections, followed by the Christian Democrats. The two parties formed a coalition government (the first in Lithuania's history). In February Valdas Adamkus was elected President by a narrow margin. The judiciary is independent.

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 (22 percent), followed by industrial enterprises (19.9 percent, including electricity, gas, and water supply) and wholesale and retail trade (14.8 percent). About 31.6 percent of those employed work for state enterprises, while 68.4 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 the year was 2.6 percent, compared with an annual rate of 8.4 percent for 1997. Per capita gross domestic product for the first half of the year was estimated at \$1,240 (4,960 litas) and unemployment at mid-year was 6.2 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, and prolonged detention in a small number of cases is still a problem. The police investigated the desecration of two Jewish sites 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.

In May President Adamkus announced an initiative to form an international commission for research into crimes against humanity perpetrated in Lithuania from 1939-91. By year's end, the commission had not yet received funding for its proposed budget, action plan, or staff.

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 kidnaped.

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 79 officers were dismissed for illegal or fraudulent activities in the first 6 months of the year for a variety of offenses, compared with 182 for all of 1997. 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 1997.

Human rights violations committed by noncommissioned military personnel continue, despite efforts to quash hazing--a practice inherited from the former Soviet armed forces. As living conditions improve for military personnel, there has been a significant reduction in human rights violations committed by noncommissioned officers. During the first 8 months of the year, 34 cases were brought against conscripts and officers, of whom 5 were charged with "hooliganism" and 1 was charged with causing intentional bodily injury. According to the Ministry of National Defense, most trauma inflicted on conscripts is psychological rather than physical. 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 also must approve the detention. At the end of that period, police must decide whether to make a formal arrest, and a magistrate must approve an arrest warrant. The authorities have 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 was passed as a temporary measure and was repealed in June 1997. The 1993 law 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 was to give prosecutors and investigators additional time to conduct an investigation and file formal criminal charges against the detainee. The Government is addressing concerns that periods of detention were excessive.

In the most widely known case, businessman Arvydas Stasaitis, who was accused of embezzlement and misappropriation of funds, was kept in detention in a hard labor camp from November 1994 until October 1998 when he was sentenced to 7 years imprisonment. He was originally, under house arrest, but fled the country. He was arrested abroad, repatriated, and incarcerated.

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 during the year 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.

An arbitration system for commercial cases was established in 1997 by the Lithuanian Chamber of Commerce, Lithuanian Industrialists' Association, the Association of Lithuanian Banks, and the Association of International Chambers of Commerce. With the abolition of the Economic Court in September, commercial cases will be resolved through arbitration or heard in county or district court. In addition as a result of accession to the Council of Europe in 1993, the Ministry of Justice initiated in

1995 an ongoing process to review Lithuania's laws to bring them into accord with the provisions of the European Convention on Basic Human Rights and Freedoms.

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 the first such cases since 1994, the Supreme Court during the year overturned the rehabilitation of 22 persons.

Formal charges have been brought against alleged war criminals Aleksandras Lileikis and Kazys Gimzauskas. 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. Gimzauskas, who had served as Lileikis's deputy, had returned to Lithuania in 1993. After his appointment in February 1997, Prosecutor General Kazys Pednycia actively investigated the case, and prepared to prosecute Lileikis by the end of June 1997. However, the law stipulates that the accused has a right to a fair, public trial and that the trial cannot proceed if the accused's health precludes his or her appearance in court. The Seimas passed legislation at the end of 1997 to allow indictment of persons accused of war crimes in absentia, which authorities did. Due to Lileikis's continued assertions that his health is poor, formal court proceedings begun in September were suspended by the judge pending a medical examination of Lileikis's physical and mental fitness. Medical commission members stated on October 12 that Lileikis was fit to stand trial. Lileikis appeared at his trial in November, but he was removed from the courtroom ostensibly due to poor health when he appeared to suffer from exhaustion. A medical commission appointed by the Court is expected to rule in January 1999 on whether Lileikis and Gimzauskas are fit to stand trial.

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.

However, it is assumed widely 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 for 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 1996, after a draft public information law failed to pass in 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 an 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.

Journalists covering organized crime continue to receive threats to their safety and welfare.

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 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 has not yet been able to register as a traditional Jewish religion. The Ministry of Justice has argued 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 has stated 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, it has stated that the Hasidic movement only began in Lithuania in the 18th century and has been suspended twice. The Chabad Lubavich community countered that the suspension of its activity during the war years and subsequently was imposed by Nazi and Soviet occupiers. It also has protested the disassociation of the Hasidic movement from Judaism. The Chabad Lubavich continue to press for recognition as a traditional religion. The Ministry of Justice is reviewing the status of Chabad Lubavich. The inability to register has not had a direct impact on Chabad Lubavich activities; the Chabad Lubavich operates a school (kindergarten through 12th grade), a social center, and a kosher kitchen.

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 1997 the Law on Refugee Status came into effect, allowing for the first formal grant of refugee status to qualified applicants, in accordance with the provisions of the 1951 Geneva Convention on the Status of Refugees and Its 1967 Protocol.

There is a registration center for migrants and asylum seekers in the town of Pabrade, where 198 illegal immigrants were registered by year's end. Conditions at Pabrade are unpleasant but support basic needs. A modern, well-equipped refugee reception center, opened in 1997 in the town of Rukla. It has approximately 200 residents and is intended to help integrate those persons granted refugee status into society. As of the end of the year, over 1,600 illegal immigrants either departed Lithuania of their own accord or were repatriated with international financial assistance.

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 Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and other humanitarian organizations in assisting refugees. The issue of the provision of first asylum did not arise during the year. 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 elected to the Seimas in the 1996 parliamentary elections.

The Citizenship Law, adopted in 1991 and amended in 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; there is 1 female minister in the 14-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, which 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 only now are being formed. A women's shelter funded in part with Norwegian assistance is now in operation. According to one sociological survey published in 1997, 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 the year (83) is proportionally the same as the 166 rapes reported for all of 1997. Official statistics on the incidence of abuse of women in the home are not filed separately from other categories of assault. 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 into prostitution and sold 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 often are 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 actually are 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 underrepresented significantly 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 34,379 children during the 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, the last year such statistics were collected. However, no department or organization collects information on child abuse. 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 abused sexually.

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

The 1991 Law on Integrating Disabled People provides for a broad category of rights and public benefits to which disabled people are legally entitled. 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. During the year the Parliament allotted approximately \$35 million (140 million litas) for persons with disabilities, including \$20 million (80 million litas) for institutions caring for such persons, \$6.8 million (27.3 million litas) for various specific programs, and \$5.8 million (23.4 million litas) for orthopedic assistance programs. A project in Kaunas to build an apartment building for persons with disabilities has not been completed due to a lack of funds and the pending privatization of the state institution that was to have supervised the project. A center for deaf children has been created, as has a program for children with special orthopedic problems.

Religious Minorities

Jewish community leaders expressed their concern regarding desecration at the cemetery in Kaunas and at a monument marking a former cemetery site in Vilnius. Although authorities responded promptly in both cases, no witnesses were found and no charges were brought. A certain level of anti-Semitic sentiment persists in the country. However, on January 23, Lithuanian Fascist Youth activist Vidmantas Gulbinas was sentenced in the port city of Klaipeda to 3 years of incarceration at a hard labor facility for "malignant hooliganism" in connection with a series of attacks on

non-ethnic Lithuanians between 1995 and 1997 and desecration of a Jewish cemetery in 1995. This was the first such conviction since Lithuanian independence was restored in 1990.

National/Racial/Ethnic Minorities

Minority ethnic groups--including Russians, Poles, Belarusians, Ukrainians, Tatars, and Karaites--make up roughly 20 percent of the country's citizens.

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 competence is to be achieved. During the first 6 months of the year, 248 persons applied for citizenship, of whom 220 were granted citizenship upon passing a language test. Of 1,650 persons who asked that their citizenship rights be restored in the first half of the year, citizenship was confirmed for 881 persons. 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.

Vidmantas Gulbinas's January conviction and sentence for "malicious hooliganism" resulted from several crimes, including assaulting a Japanese citizen in Vilnius's cathedral square in 1995; assaulting two ethnic Russians at a night club in Klaipeda in 1996; and pushing a Korean fisherman into the Dane river in Klaipeda in 1997.

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. There were no major strikes during the year.

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 increasingly are 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. Since the second quarter of 1996, there has been a slowdown in the growth rate of consumer prices, while wage

increases have picked up speed. Average wages grew by 12 percent while the inflation rate was 2.4 percent in 1998.

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 legal minimum age for employment of children without parental consent 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.

The Constitution specifically prohibits forced and bonded labor by children, and this prohibition is observed in practice (see Section 6.c.)

e. Acceptable Conditions of Work

The legal minimum wage is \$107.50 (430 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 \$258 (1,032 Litas) per month, compared with \$215 (861 Litas) in 1997. 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 70 percent of their income on food, compared with 36 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. There are 10 regional labor inspection offices and 3 specialized inspection offices. The largest offices employ between 20 and 30 persons. They closed 262 enterprises or individual departments of enterprises found to be in violation of safety regulations during the year, compared with 91 closures for 1997. Unsafe conditions caused by worn, outdated industrial technologies are reportedly widespread, and 101 work-related deaths were recorded during the year, compared with 80 work-related deaths for 1997.

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