



LATVIJAS REPUBLIKAS
SAEIMA



■ Main building of the Saeima

Saeima of the Republic of Latvia

Latvia is an independent democratic republic, and the sovereign power is vested in the people of Latvia. The Saeima is composed of 100 representatives of the people—members of parliament (MPs). The Constitution sets forth the main functions of the Saeima, and the Rules of Procedure drafted by the Saeima set forth its internal rules and regulations.

The Saeima is elected for a term of four years in general, equal, and direct elections conducted by secret ballot and based on proportional representation. All citizens of Latvia who enjoy full rights of citizenship and who on election day have attained 18 years of age are entitled to vote.

Any citizen of Latvia who enjoys full rights of citizenship and who is more than 21 years of age on election day may be elected to the Saeima. A person elected to the Saeima acquires the mandate of an MP upon giving the oath of office.

The work of the Saeima is managed by the Presidium elected from among the MPs at the beginning of the Saeima's term of office. The Presidium consists of five MPs—the Speaker, two Deputy Speakers, the Secretary, and the Deputy Secretary.

Saeima committees specialise in particular areas of legislation or fulfil other functions—for example, assess the

validity of public expenditures, consider violations of the principles of ethics, or review Latvia's positions on EU issues.

Pursuant to the Rules of Procedure, there are 16 standing committees in the Saeima.

At least five MPs belonging to the same political party or list of candidates may form a parliamentary group. If an MP leaves a parliamentary group, they retain the mandate of an MP and are then considered an unaffiliated member of parliament. Parliamentary groups may form political blocs.

The Council of Parliamentary Groups is formed in order to determine and coordinate the activities and strategies of parliamentary groups and political blocs within the Saeima and its committees, as well as to resolve issues which are not covered by the Rules of Procedure. This Council is composed of the Presidium and one MP from each parliamentary group and political bloc.

The work of the Saeima is organised in sessions. Each year the Saeima holds three regular sessions: an autumn, winter, and spring session. Extraordinary sessions may be convened during the recess. Plenary sittings are usually held once a week on Thursdays. Live broadcasts of plenary sittings and sittings devoted to answering parliamentary questions can be heard on the radio and

viewed on the Saeima website and its Facebook page. In accordance with the Rules of Procedure, the Saeima may hold a closed plenary sitting if at least two-thirds of the MPs present vote to do so; however, this has never happened so far.

The working language of the Saeima is Latvian.

Legislation

The Saeima has several functions, the most important of which is the adoption of laws. Draft laws may be submitted to the Saeima by the President of Latvia, the Cabinet of Ministers, committees of the Saeima, not fewer than five MPs, or not less than one-tenth of the electorate. The Saeima is entitled to make amendments to the Constitution. The most lively and thorough debates concerning draft laws take place in the committees, which consider matters that are then debated at the plenary sittings.

Adoption of the national budget

Before the beginning of each fiscal year, the Saeima decides on the annual revenues and expenditures of the state. The government submits a draft State budget to the Saeima, and a vote on the State budget is actually a vote of confidence in the government, as rejecting ▶



■ Plenary sittings

its draft State budget amounts to a vote of no confidence in it. Consideration of the draft State budget and related draft laws usually results in the lengthiest debates at plenary sittings.

After the end of the fiscal year, the Cabinet of Ministers submits an overview of the State budget implementation to the Saeima for approval.

Parliamentary scrutiny

The Saeima supervises the everyday work of the government; the government as a whole and each minister individually are politically accountable to the Saeima.

Once a year at a plenary sitting, the Prime Minister reports on the government's performance and its planned activities. Furthermore, the Saeima hosts the annual foreign policy debate, which is attended by foreign affairs experts. The Ombudsman also gives an annual report on the work of the Ombudsman's Office at a plenary sitting.

The Saeima holds sittings devoted to answering parliamentary questions. During these sittings, MPs hear answers to their questions submitted to the Prime Minister, line ministers, or the Governor of the Bank of Latvia about matters within the competence of these officials.

If MPs are dissatisfied with the work of a ministry, they may submit an inquiry

to the government. When approving the inquiry, the Saeima may also decide to hold a vote of no confidence in the relevant minister or in the entire government. Committees have the right to request information necessary for their work and explanations from specific ministries, institutions subordinated to them, and local government institutions; they also have the right to invite relevant public officials to provide information in person at committee meetings.

Established for a specific purpose, parliamentary investigative committees, in cooperation with experts, have the right to scrutinise the work of state and local government institutions, as well as private agencies and companies which directly or indirectly receive state subsidies, loans, or government contracts, or participate in the privatisation of national or local government property. Parliamentary investigative committees have the right to invite and question public entities on the matter they are investigating.

Appointment of public officials

The Saeima uses the open ballot procedure for electing, approving, and appointing many public officials of this country, as well as accepting their resignation or dismissing them. These public officials include the President of Latvia, Prosecutor General, Director of the

Corruption Prevention and Combating Bureau, Governor of the Bank of Latvia, members of the National Electronic Mass Media Council, Director of the Constitution Protection Bureau, judges, Ombudsman, and Auditor General.

To commence its duties, the government first needs to have the confidence of the Saeima. The President of Latvia nominates the Prime Minister. The Saeima takes a vote of confidence in the new government after the nominated Prime Minister has presented the government's platform to the Saeima.

International activity

All international agreements which pertain to matters that must be decided according to legislative procedure require ratification by the Saeima.

Along with their work in the plenary sittings, committees, and parliamentary groups, MPs also meet foreign officials and delegations. The Saeima is a member of international parliamentary organisations, and it actively cooperates with parliaments of other countries.

Staff of the Saeima

The parliament has a total of about 550 staff members. Organisational units of the Administration, as well as the Legal Bureau, the Interparliamentary Relations Bureau, the Public Relations Bureau, and the Analytical Service allow MPs to work efficiently. ■