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The *Saeima*<sup>1</sup> has adopted and the President has proclaimed the following Law:

## Official Language Law

### Section 1.

The purpose of this Law is to ensure:

- 1) the maintenance, protection and development of the Latvian language;
- 2) the maintenance of the cultural and historic heritage of the Latvian nation;
- 3) the right to freely use the Latvian language in any sphere of life within the whole territory of Latvia;
- 4) the integration of members of ethnic minorities into the society of Latvia, while observing their rights to use their native language or other languages;
- 5) the increased influence of the Latvian language in the cultural environment of Latvia, to promote a more rapid integration of society.

### Section 2.

(1) This Law prescribes the use and protection of the official language in State and local government institutions, courts and institutions constituting the judicial system, as well as in other institutions, organisations and undertakings (companies), the educational sphere and other spheres.

(2) Language use in private institutions, organisations, undertakings (companies) and with respect to self-employed persons shall be regulated, if their activities affect the lawful interests of the public (public security, health, morality, health care, protection of consumer rights and employment rights, safety in the work place and public administration supervision) (hereinafter also - lawful interests of the public) and to the extent that the necessary restriction which has been set in the lawful interests of the public is proportional to the rights and interests of private institutions, organisations and undertakings (companies).

(3) This Law does not apply to the use of language in unofficial communications of the inhabitants of Latvia, in internal communications of national and ethnic groups, or in services, ceremonies, rituals and other kinds of religious activity of religious organisations.

### Section 3.

(1) The official language in the Republic of Latvia is the Latvian language.

(2) In the Republic of Latvia, everyone has the right to present submissions and communicate in the official language in institutions, public and religious organisations and undertakings (companies).

(3) The State shall ensure the development and use of the Latvian sign language for communication with people with impaired hearing.

(4) The State shall ensure the maintenance, protection and development of the Latgalian written language as a historic variant of the Latvian language.

#### **Section 4.**

The State shall ensure the maintenance, protection and development of the Liv language as the language of the indigenous (autochthon) population.

#### **Section 5.**

Any other language used in the Republic of Latvia, except the Liv language, shall be regarded, within the meaning of this Law, as a foreign language.

#### **Section 6.**

(1) Employees of State and local government institutions, courts and institutions constituting the judicial system, State and local government undertakings, as well as employees of companies in which the greatest share of capital is owned by the State or a local government, shall be fluent in and use the official language to the extent necessary for performance of their professional duties and duties of office.

(2) Employees of private institutions, organisations and undertakings (companies), and self-employed persons, shall use the official language if their activities affect the lawful interests of the public (public security, health, morality, health care, protection of consumer rights and employment rights, safety in the work place, supervision of public administration).

(3) Employees of private institutions, organisations and undertakings (companies), and self-employed persons who perform specific public functions on the basis of laws or other regulatory enactments, shall be fluent in and use the official language to the extent necessary for performance of the relevant functions.

(4) Foreign experts and members of foreign boards of undertakings (companies) who work in Latvia shall be fluent in and use the official language to the extent that is necessary for the performance of their professional duties and duties of office, or shall themselves ensure translation into the official language.

(5) The extent of the knowledge of the official language required for the persons referred to in Paragraphs one, two and three of this Section, and the procedures for testing fluency of the Latvian language shall be prescribed by the Cabinet.

#### **Section 7.**

(1) In State and local government institutions, courts and institutions constituting the judicial system, State or local government undertakings, and companies in which the greatest share of capital is owned by the State or a local government, the language of sittings and other official meetings at work shall be the official language. If the organiser considers it necessary to use a foreign language during the meeting, he or she shall ensure translation into the official language.

(2) In all other cases where a foreign language is used during sittings and other official meetings at work, the organiser shall ensure translation into the official language, if such is required by even one participant at the meeting.

#### **Section 8.**

(1) In State and local government institutions, courts and institutions constituting the judicial system, State and local government undertakings, and companies in which the greatest share of capital is owned by the State or a local government, the official language shall be used for record-keeping and documents. Correspondence and other kinds of communication with foreign states may take place in a foreign language.

(2) The employees of private institutions, organisations, undertakings (companies), and self-employed persons, shall use the official language in record-keeping and documents, if their activities affect the lawful interests of the public (public security, health, morality, health care, protection of consumer rights and employment rights, safety at the work place and public administration supervision).

(3) Private institutions, organisations, undertakings (companies), and self-employed persons who perform specific public functions on the basis of laws or other regulatory enactments, shall use the official language for record-keeping and documents that are related to the performance of the relevant functions.

(4) Statistical summaries, annual accounts, accounting documents and other documents which are to be submitted to State or local government institutions on the basis of laws or other regulatory enactments, shall be drawn up in the official language.

#### **Section 9.**

Contracts of natural and legal persons regarding provision of medical treatment, health care, public safety and other public services in the territory of Latvia shall be entered into in the official language. If a contract is in a foreign language, a translation into the official language shall be attached thereto.

## **Section 10.**

(1) All institutions, organisations and undertakings (companies) shall ensure acceptance and examination of documents drawn up in the official language.

(2) State and local government institutions, courts and institutions constituting the judicial system, and State or local government undertakings (companies) shall accept from persons and examine only documents as are in the official language, except in cases as prescribed in Paragraphs three and four of this Section and in other laws. The provisions of this Section do not apply to submissions of persons to police and medical institutions, rescue services and other institutions in cases of urgent calls for medical aid, commission of crimes or other violations of law, or calls for emergency assistance in cases of fire, accident or other emergencies.

(3) Documents from persons in a foreign language shall be accepted if attached thereto is a translation into the official language, certified in accordance with the procedures prescribed by the Cabinet, or notarially certified. Translation into the official language is not required for documents that have been issued in the territory of Latvia by the day this Law comes into force.

(4) State and local government institutions, organisations and undertakings (companies) may accept and examine documents from foreign countries without a translation into the official language.

## **Section 11.**

(1) Events organised by State and local government institutions, courts and institutions constituting the judicial system, State and local government undertakings, and by companies in which the greatest share of capital is owned by the State or a local government, shall take place in the official language. If a foreign language is used at an event, the organiser shall ensure translation into the official language.

(2) At events taking place in the territory of Latvia, in which foreign legal and natural persons participate and in the organisation of which institutions referred to in Paragraph one of this Section concurrently take part, one of the working languages shall be the official language, and the organiser of the event shall ensure translation into the official language. In cases determined by the Cabinet, the State Language Centre may exempt the organiser of an event from such a requirement.

(3) In compliance with the purpose of this Law, and the basic principles for the use of the language contained in Section 2 of this Law, the Cabinet may determine cases when, taking into account the lawful interests of the public, an obligation to ensure translation into the official language may also be imposed upon organisers of other events taking place in the territory of Latvia.

(4) The use of language in meetings, processions and pickets shall be determined by the Law On Meetings, Processions and Pickets.

## **Section 12.**

In the units of the National Armed Forces only the official language shall be used, except in cases when provided otherwise by other laws or international agreements of the Republic of Latvia or in international agreements regarding participation of the National Armed Forces in international operations or training.

## **Section 13.**

Court proceedings in the Republic of Latvia shall take place in the official language. The right to use a foreign language in court shall be determined by laws regulating the judicial system and court procedure.

## **Section 14.**

The right to acquire education in the official language is guaranteed in the Republic of Latvia. The use of the official language in regard to education shall be determined by the laws regulating education.

## **Section 15.**

The written work necessary to acquire academic degrees shall be submitted in the official language or in a foreign language with an attached translation of an expanded summary into the official language. The public defence may take place in the official language or in a foreign language, pursuant to agreement with the author and acceptance by the relevant board for conferring academic degrees.

## **Section 16.**

The language of mass media broadcasts shall be determined by the Radio and Television Law.

## **Section 17.**

(1) Films, videos and parts thereof to be exhibited in public shall be recorded or dubbed in the official language, or

be supplied, concurrently with the original sound recording, with subtitles in the official language, observing the existing literary norms of the language.

(2) In the cases referred to in this Section, subtitles in a foreign language may also be allowed concurrently with the official language. The subtitles in the official language shall be placed in the primary position, and they may not, in their form or content, be smaller or narrower than the subtitles in the foreign language.

#### **Section 18.**

(1) Place names in the Republic of Latvia shall be created and use thereof shall be in the official language.

(2) The names of institutions, public organisations, undertakings (companies) founded in the Republic of Latvia shall be created and use thereof shall be in the official language, except in cases prescribed in other laws.

(3) Names of the events referred to in Section 11 of this Law shall be created and use thereof shall be in the official language, except in cases prescribed in other laws.

(4) Names of places, institutions, public organisations and undertakings (companies) in the Liv coastal territory, and names of events taking place in this territory, shall also be created and use thereof shall be in the Liv language.

(5) The creation and use of names shall be regulated by Regulations of the Cabinet.

#### **Section 19.**

(1) Names of persons shall be presented in accordance with the traditions of the Latvian language and written in accordance with the existing norms of the literary language, observing the provisions of Paragraph two of this Section.

(2) There shall be set out in a passport or birth certificate, in addition to the name and surname of the person presented in accordance with the existing norms of the Latvian language, the historic family name of the person, or the original form of the personal name in a different language, transliterated in the Roman alphabet, if the person or the parents of a minor person so wish and can verify such by documents.

(3) The written form and identification of names and surnames, as well as the written form and use in the Latvian language of foreign language personal names, shall be regulated by Cabinet regulations.

#### **Section 20.**

(1) Texts of seals and stamps, except those specified in Paragraph three of this Section, shall be created in the official language, if the seals and stamps are used on documents as are, in accordance with the requirements of this Law or other regulatory enactments, to be drawn up in the official language.

(2) Texts of printed forms, except those specified in Paragraph three of this Section, shall be created in the official language, if the printed forms are used for the drawing up of such documents as are, in accordance with the requirements of this Law or other regulatory enactments, to be drawn up in the official language.

(3) In State and local government institutions, courts and institutions constituting the judicial system, State and local government undertakings, and companies in which the greatest share of capital is owned by the State or a local government, the texts of seals and stamps, and the texts of printed forms, shall be drawn up only in the official language, except in cases specified in Paragraph four of this Section. This provision is applicable also to private institutions, organisations, undertakings (companies), and self-employed persons, who, on the basis of laws or other regulatory enactments, perform specific public functions, if the use of seals, stamps or printed forms is related to the performance of the relevant functions.

(4) The Cabinet shall determine the cases when the institutions and persons referred to in Paragraph three of this Section may, in creating and using seals, stamps and printed forms, concurrently with the official language, also use foreign languages.

(5) If a foreign language is used concurrently with the official language in creating and using text in seals, stamps and printed forms, the text in the official language shall be placed in the primary position, and it may not, in its form or contents, be smaller or narrower than the text in the foreign language.

#### **Section 21.**

(1) Information provided for public information purposes by State and local government institutions, courts and institutions constituting the judicial system, State and local government undertakings, and companies in which the greatest share of capital is owned by the State or a local government, shall be provided only in the official language, except in cases determined in Paragraph five of this Section. This provision is also applicable to private institutions, organisations, undertakings (companies), and self-employed persons, who perform, on the basis of laws or other regulatory enactments, specific public functions, if the provision of information is related to the performance of the relevant functions.

(2) Information contained in the labels and marking of goods manufactured in Latvia, instructions for use, and statements on the manufactured product, its packaging or container shall be in the official language. If a foreign language is used concurrently with the official language, the text in the official language shall be placed in primary position, and it may not, in its form or contents, be smaller or narrower than the text in the foreign language. These provisions do not apply to goods intended for export.

(3) Any imported goods, the labelling, instructions for use, guarantee documents or the technical certificate of which includes information in a foreign language, shall have attached thereto a translation of such information in the official language.

(4) Information included in statements, signs, posters, placards, announcements or other notices, if it affects the lawful interests of the public and is intended for public awareness in places accessible to the public, shall be provided in the official language, except in cases prescribed in Paragraph five of this Section.

(5) Observing the purpose of this Law, and the basic principles for the use of language contained in Section 2 of this Law, the Cabinet shall determine cases where a foreign language may be used concurrently with the official language in information that is intended for public awareness in places accessible to the public.

(6) The Cabinet shall also determine cases where the institutions and persons referred to in Paragraph one of this Section may provide information in a foreign language, as well as the procedures for the use of languages in the information provided for in Paragraphs one, two, three and four of this Section.

(7) If a foreign language is used concurrently with the official language in the information, the text in the official language shall be placed in the primary position, and it may not, in its form or contents, be smaller or narrower than the text in the foreign language.

#### **Section 22.**

(1) In specialised educational literature, and technical and record-keeping documentation, unified terminology shall be used. The development and use of terms shall be determined by the Terminology Commission of the Academy of Science of Latvia (hereinafter - the Terminology Commission). New terms and their defining standards shall be used in official communication only after their approval by the Terminology Commission and publication in the newspaper *Latvijas Vēstnesis* [the official Gazette of the Government of Latvia].

(2) The by-laws of the Terminology Commission shall be approved by the Cabinet.

#### **Section 23.**

(1) In official communication the Latvian language shall be used, observing existing literary language norms.

(2) The norms of Latvian literary language shall be codified by the Latvian Language Expert Commission of the State Language Centre.

(3) The by-laws of the Latvian Language Expert Commission and the norms of Latvian literary language shall be approved by the Cabinet.

#### **Section 24.**

(1) It is the duty of State and local government institutions to ensure the provision of material resources for research, cultivation and development of the Latvian language.

(2) The State shall ensure the development of an official language policy, incorporating in it scientific research, protection and teaching of the Latvian language, promoting enlargement of the role of the Latvian language in the national economy, and cultivating individual and public understanding of the language as a national value.

#### **Section 25.**

For violation of the provisions of this Law, offenders shall be held liable in accordance with the procedures prescribed by law.

#### **Section 26.**

(1) Compliance with this Law in the Republic of Latvia shall be supervised by the State Language Centre.

(2) The State Language Centre shall be subject to the supervision of the Ministry of Justice, and its by-laws shall be approved by the Cabinet.

### **Transitional provisions**

1. This law shall come into force on 1 September 2000.

2. With the coming into force of this Law, the Republic of Latvia Language Law is repealed (*Latvijas PSR Augstākās Padomes un Valdības Ziņotājs*, 1989, No. 20).

3. The Cabinet shall adopt, by 1 September 2000, the regulatory enactments referred to in this Law, and approve the by-laws of the Latvian Language Expert Commission and the Terminology Commission.

This Law has been adopted by the *Saeima* on 9 December 1999.

President V. Vīķe-Freiberga

Riga, 21 December 1999

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<sup>1</sup> The Parliament of the Republic of Latvia

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