

Cooperation between the Saeima and non-governmental organisations

On 30 March 2006, the Saeima adopted a declaration which sets forth the principles for cooperation between the Saeima and non-governmental organisations (NGOs), as well as tasks to be implemented for improving this cooperation.

Along with the Saeima's everyday cooperation with NGOs concerning the process of legislation, a meeting of representatives from the Saeima and NGOs has also become a tradition. This meeting is a forum which assesses the results of existing cooperation and works out an agenda for further cooperation.

Declaration about the development of a civil society in Latvia and cooperation with non-governmental organisations

Being aware of the importance of a civil society with regard to the country's and people's sustainable development, as well as of the influence of non-governmental organisations upon the quality of decisions adopted by the Saeima, the cooperation between NGOs and the Saeima has to be extended; moreover, it is necessary to facilitate the development of a civil society and improve the working environment of NGOs. The cooperation between the Saeima and NGOs creates a closer link between legislators, on the one hand, and society and an individual, on the other hand. With regard to their cooperation, the Saeima and NGOs try to become successful partners in supporting a civil society and involving it in the process of preparing laws.

Aim of the declaration

The aim of this declaration is to ensure the development of a civil society in Latvia and to improve cooperation between the Saeima and NGOs on the basis of mutual understanding and support, and to emphasise the importance of NGO activities in a democratic country.

Cooperation principles

The Saeima invites society to organise itself for representing its interests, particularly by using the opportunities offered by the Law on Associations and Foundations, as well as to actively participate in decision-making on a local, national and international level. NGOs as an organised part of civil society ensure the above-mentioned goals not by serving narrow commercial and political party and association-related interests but by voicing and supporting interests of wider groups of society. The Saeima considers NGOs as an equal partner and acknowledges that the participation of NGOs provides an essential contribution in the process of initiating, preparing and assessing laws. The Saeima, by improving the availability of information and using the results of research carried out by NGO experts, ensures the quality of adopted laws. In implementing the mutual cooperation, the Saeima and NGOs observe principles of sustainable development and succession. The Saeima ensures openness and transparency in developing this cooperation, and it offers equal opportuni-

ties for all non-governmental organisations. The Saeima does not support activities which may create favourable conditions for corruption or conflict of interests or which may cause suspicion thereof. The Saeima supports NGOs by drafting legal provisions that facilitate a favourable environment for the development of a civil society and NGOs. To strengthen the civil society and facilitate the participation of NGOs, best national and international practice is used.

The Saeima recognises the need to:

- 1) facilitate the legal environment (including a favourable financial and budgetary policy) required for developing and strengthening a civil society, as well as for the activities of non-governmental organisations;
- 2) especially support the involvement of regional non-governmental organisations in the decision-making, and, together with these organisations, to develop mechanisms for facilitating participation of regional NGOs on the regional and national level;
- 3) especially support the creation of NGO cooperation networks and their activities in developing a civil society, as well as in other areas that benefit the public.

The Saeima decides to:

- 1) regularly assess the cooperation between the Saeima and NGOs and facilitate the exchange of experience of the Saeima committees by promoting the creation of a unified method for involving these organisations in the process of preparing laws;
- 2) provide for the Saeima in general and for each Saeima committee a coordinator responsible for cooperation with NGOs;
- 3) continuously improve the Saeima website and other mechanisms in order to inform NGOs and society about the work of the Saeima and its committees, as well as to facilitate educating the non-governmental organisations about participation in the process of preparing laws;
- 4) involve, according to a specific procedure, representatives of NGOs in the work of the Saeima committees and, within the framework of these committees, hear the opinions and suggestions of NGOs and society about the issues within the competence of the relevant committee;
- 5) arrange, according to a specific procedure, consideration of proposals for improving draft laws and draft decisions;
- 6) organise, not less than once a year, a meeting between the Saeima, along with the chairmen of its committees, and representatives of NGOs, i.e., a forum which assesses the results of existing cooperation and works out an agenda for further cooperation;
- 7) ask the forum to create a cooperation institution whose aim is to administer and coordinate the cooperation between the Saeima and NGOs, as well as to gather and review proposals for developing a civil society and improving cooperation between the Saeima and NGOs.