

# European Affairs

## Committee of the Saeima

The European Affairs Committee (hereinafter, the Committee) was established in October 1997 at a time when the government of Latvia submitted its application for accession to the EU to Spain, which was then the presiding EU country. The aim of the Committee was to harmonise national laws with the EU legislation. In 2001, the Committee was authorised to represent the Saeima on EU-related matters.

The role of the Committee changed when Latvia became an EU member state on 1 May 2004. Now its priorities include approving national positions, supervising the use of EU funding, involving NGOs and civil society in EU legislative processes, as well as cooperating with EU neighbouring countries.

### Functions of the Committee

According to the Rules of Procedure of the Saeima, the European Affairs Committee represents the Saeima on EU-related matters. The Committee approves national positions before they are reviewed in the Council of the European Union<sup>1</sup>. It also coordinates the compliance of

issues. The Committee cooperates with the European Affairs Committees of other parliaments of the EU member states and candidate countries.

### Composition of the Committee

The European Affairs Committee is one of the largest Saeima committees. Currently, the Committee consists of 19 members. According to the Rules of Procedure of the Saeima, the Committee should have at least one representative from each parliamentary group of the Saeima. The number of MPs from each parliamentary group is proportional to the number of seats the relevant parliamentary group has in the Saeima. The administrative work of the Committee is ensured by consultants and the attaché of the Saeima to the Permanent Representation of Latvia to the European Union.

The current composition of the Committee can be viewed on the [Saeima website](#).

### Approving national positions

The European Affairs Committee approves national positions prepared by the Cabinet of Ministers. The minister who represents Latvia in a relevant Council of the European Union has to inform the Committee on the government's position regarding all significant decisions on legislative and strategic issues before they are presented to the Council. The relevant minister receives a mandate to present Latvia's position to the Council only when it has been approved by the Committee. If the Committee rejects the position approved by the Cabinet of Ministers, the relevant ministry must change its position in accordance with the recommendations of the Committee.



Chairperson Vaira Paegle of the European Affairs Committee

draft laws reviewed by the Saeima with EU legislation. Members of the Committee meet ministers on a regular basis in order to discuss the progress achieved by relevant ministries in the EU integration.

The European Affairs Committee actively supervises efficient use of EU Structural Funds. Approximately once in a quarter, ministry representatives are invited to attend Committee meetings in order to present reports on these

<sup>1</sup> The Council of the European Union is one of the main decision-making bodies in the European Union which realises the interests of the member states; relevant line ministers are represented at the Council of the European Union.

### Former chairmen of the European Affairs Committee:

- **Māris Gailis** – from 16.11.1995 to 08.02.1996
- **Anatolijs Gorbunovs** – from 08.02.1996 to 08.08.1996
- **Edvīns Inkēns** – from 30.09.1996 to 04.11.2002
- **Guntars Krasts** – from 21.11.2002 to 21.07.2004
- **Oskars Kastēns** – from 12.08.2004 to 06.11.2006
- **Vaira Paegle** – since 16.11.2006

## Impact of the Treaty of Lisbon on the work of the Committee

The Treaty of Lisbon envisages greater opportunities for national parliaments to become actively involved in the legislative process of the European Union and to influence it. According to the Treaty of Lisbon, draft legislation of the EU should be sent to national parliaments, which during an eight-week period prepare their opinion on the observance of the subsidiarity principle<sup>2</sup>. If one-third of member-state parliaments (parliaments of nine countries) think that the sphere covered by the relevant draft legislative act should not be regulated on the EU level, the draft must be revised. It means that after the Treaty of Lisbon came into effect, the Committee has to assess the draft legislative acts of the European Union and provide opinions on subsidiarity.



Committee meeting: (from left) S.Bendrāte, S.Āboltiņa, M.Roze, V.Muižniece, J.Eglītis.

## Cooperation of the European Affairs Committee with other Saeima committees

The European Affairs Committee actively cooperates with other committees of the Saeima; they hold joint meetings during which they discuss topical issues and define Latvia's opinion on events and processes which are taking place in the EU.

## Cooperation of the Committee with other parliaments

The Committee regularly meets with its counterparts from other parliaments of the European Union member states during COSAC conferences (from French *Conférence des Organes Spécialisés dans les Affaires Communautaires*).

<sup>2</sup> The subsidiarity principle envisages the adoption of decisions at the lowest possible level. In the context of the EU legislation, this principle provides for distributing the spheres of responsibility between the EU and its member states.

### Interesting facts:

- The European Affairs Committee is one of the largest Saeima committees. Nearly one-fifth of the Saeima members are members of this Committee. For this reason the Committee meetings are held in the Red Room, which is the second largest room in the Saeima building.
- On 18 May 2009, during the fifth anniversary of Latvia's accession to the European Union, the European Affairs Committee held a ceremonial meeting devoted to defending Latvia's interests on the EU level. Former Committee chairmen were invited to attend this meeting.
- On 28 August 2009, the European Affairs Committee and MEPs from Latvia agreed that MEPs from Latvia would attend at least one Committee meeting during the Saeima session in order to harmonise opinions on topical issues of the EU agenda.

Participants of this conference address issues related to EU legislation, as well as proposals and initiatives on the subsidiarity principle. Furthermore, representatives of the European Affairs Committees of the national parliaments of the European Union can jointly agree on specific initiatives and put them on the agenda of the EU.

The Committee actively cooperates with EU neighbouring countries. Experience which has been accumulated by Latvia during EU integration is shared in the framework of development cooperation projects. The Committee has organised a number of training courses for colleagues from Ukrainian, Georgian and Moldovan parliaments.

## Observe the work of the Committee!

The agenda of the Committee meetings and press releases on the issues addressed by the Committee are available on the Saeima website. Its Committee meetings are open to the public. Visitors must have a passport and a pass to the Saeima in order to attend the meeting; applications for a pass to the Saeima can be submitted to the Committee.

## Committee contact information

Address: Jēkaba iela 10/12

Rīga, LV-1811

Phone: (+ 371) 6708 7324

Fax: (+371) 6708 7366

e-mail: [elk@saeima.lv](mailto:elk@saeima.lv)

<http://www.saeima.lv/Elkom/>