

# State Language Law

## **Article 1**

The purpose of this Law shall be to ensure:

- 1) the preservation, protection and development of the Latvian language;
- 2) the preservation of the cultural and historical heritage of the Latvian nation;
- 3) the right to use the Latvian language freely in any sphere of life in the whole territory of Latvia;
- 4) the integration of national minorities into Latvian society while respecting their right to use their mother tongue or any other language;
- 5) the increase of the influence of the Latvian language in the cultural environment of Latvia by promoting a faster integration of society.

## **Article 2**

(1) This Law shall regulate the use and protection of the state language at state and municipal institutions, courts and agencies belonging to the judicial system, as well as at other agencies, organisations and enterprises (or companies), in education and other spheres.

(2) The use of language in private institutions, organisations and enterprises (or companies) and the use of language with regard to self-employed persons shall be regulated in cases when their activities concern legitimate public interests (public safety, health, morals, health care, protection of consumer rights and labour rights, workplace safety and public administrative supervision) (hereafter also: legitimate public interests) and shall be regulated to the extent that the restriction applied to ensure legitimate public interests is balanced with the rights and interests of private institutions, organisations, companies (enterprises).

(3) The Law shall not regulate the use of language in the unofficial communication of the residents of Latvia, the internal communication of national and ethnic groups, the language used during worship services, ceremonies, rites and any other kind of religious activities of religious organisations.

## **Article 3**

(1) In the Republic of Latvia, the state language shall be the Latvian language.

(2) In the Republic of Latvia every person has the right to file applications and communicate in the state language at agencies, voluntary and religious organisations, enterprises (or companies).

(3) The state shall ensure the development and use of the Latvian sign language for communication with the deaf.

(4) The state shall ensure the preservation, protection and development of the Latgalian written language as an historically-established variety of the Latvian language.

#### **Article 4**

The state shall ensure the protection, preservation and development of the Liv language as the language of the indigenous population (autochthons).

#### **Article 5**

For the purpose of this Law, any other language used in the Republic of Latvia, except the Liv language, shall be regarded as a foreign language.

#### **Article 6**

(1) Employees of state and municipal institutions, courts and agencies belonging to the judicial system, state and municipal enterprises, as well as employees in companies in which the state or a municipality holds the largest share of the capital, must know and use the state language to the extent necessary for the performance of their professional and employment duties.

(2) Employees of private institutions, organisations, enterprises (or companies), as well as self-employed persons, must use the state language if their activities relate to legitimate public interests (public safety, health, morals, health care, protection of consumer rights and labour rights, workplace safety and public administrative supervision).

(3) Employees of private institutions, organisations and enterprises (or companies), as well as self-employed persons who, as required by law or other normative acts, perform certain public functions must know and use the state language to the extent necessary for the performance of their functions.

(4) Foreign specialists and foreign members of an enterprise (or company) administration who work in Latvia must know and use the state language to the extent necessary for the performance of their professional and employment duties, or they themselves must ensure translation into the state language.

(5) The required level of the state language proficiency of the persons referred to in paragraphs 1, 2 and 3 of this Article, as well as the assessment procedure of their state language proficiency, shall be set by the Cabinet of Ministers.

### **Article 7**

(1) The state language shall be the language of formal meetings and other business meetings held by state and municipal institutions, courts and agencies belonging to the judicial system, state or municipal enterprises and companies in which the state or a municipality holds the largest share of the capital. If the organisers consider it necessary to use a foreign language during the meeting, they shall provide translation into the state language.

(2) In all other cases when a foreign language is used at formal meetings and other business meetings, the organiser shall provide translation into the state language if so requested by at least one participant of the meeting.

### **Article 8**

(1) At state and municipal institutions, courts and agencies belonging to the judicial system, state and municipal enterprises, as well as in companies in which the state or a municipality holds the largest share of the capital, the state language shall be used in record-keeping and all documents. Correspondence and other types of communication with foreign countries may be conducted in a foreign language.

(2) Employees of private institutions, organisations, enterprises (or companies), as well as self-employed persons, shall use the state language in record-keeping and documents if their activities relate to legitimate public interests (public safety, health, morals, health care, protection of consumer rights and labour rights, workplace safety and public administrative supervision).

(3) Private institutions, organisations and enterprises (or companies), as well as self-employed persons who perform public functions as required by law or other normative acts shall use the state language in record-keeping and documents which are required for performing their functions.

(4) Statistical reports, annual reports, accountancy documents and other documents which, according to law or other normative acts, are to be submitted to the state or municipal institutions shall be in the state language.

## **Article 9**

Contracts of natural and legal persons about the provision of medical and health care services, public safety and other public services in the territory of Latvia shall be in the state language. If the contracts are in a foreign language, a translation into the state language shall be attached.

## **Article 10**

(1) Any institution, organisation and enterprise (or company) shall ensure acceptance and review of documents prepared in the state language.

(2) State and municipal institutions, courts and agencies belonging to the judicial system, as well as state and municipal enterprises (or companies) shall accept and examine documents from persons only in the state language, except for cases set forth in paragraphs 3 and 4 of this Article and in other laws. The provisions of this Article do not refer to the statements of persons submitted to the police and medical institutions, rescue services and other institutions when urgent medical assistance is summoned, when a crime or other violation of the law has been committed or when emergency assistance is requested in case of fire, traffic accident or any other accident.

(3) Documents submitted by persons in a foreign languages shall be accepted if they are accompanied by a translation verified according to the procedure prescribed by the Cabinet of Ministers or by a notarised translation. No translation shall be required for documents issued in the territory of Latvia before the date on which this Law comes into force.

(4) Documents received by state and municipal institutions, organisations and enterprises (or companies) from foreign countries may be accepted and reviewed without a translation into the state language.

## **Article 11**

(1) Events organised by state and municipal institutions, courts and agencies belonging to the judicial system, state and municipal enterprises, as well as by companies in which the state or a municipality holds the largest share of the capital, shall be conducted in the state language. Should a foreign language be used, translation into the state language shall be provided by the organiser.

(2) In events taking place in the territory of Latvia in which foreign natural and legal persons participate and in which institutions mentioned in paragraph 1 of this Article participate in the organizing, one of the working languages shall be the state language, and the organiser shall ensure translation into the state

language. In cases stipulated by the Cabinet of Ministers, the State Language Centre may exempt the organiser from this requirement.

(3) Taking into account the purpose of this Law and the basic principle of language use as provided by Article 2 of this Law, the Cabinet of Ministers may determine cases when, in serving legitimate public interests, organisers of other events taking place in the territory of Latvia may be obliged to ensure translation of the event into the state language.

(4) Use of language in meetings, marches and pickets is provided for by the Law on Meetings, Marches and Pickets.

### **Article 12**

In the structural units of the National Armed Forces, only the state language shall be used except for cases when other laws and international treaties concluded by the Republic of Latvia, as well as international treaties on the participation of the National Armed Forces in international operations or exercises, stipulate otherwise.

### **Article 13**

Legal proceedings in the Republic of Latvia shall be conducted in the state language. The right to use a foreign language in court is prescribed by the laws regulating court functions and procedures.

### **Article 14**

The right to receive education conducted in the state language is guaranteed in the Republic of Latvia. The use of the state language in education is prescribed by the laws regulating education.

### **Article 15**

Research papers qualifying for a scientific degree shall be submitted in the state language or in a foreign language accompanied by a translation of a comprehensive summary in the state language. Research papers may be publicly presented in the state language or in a foreign language if the author agrees and if the relevant council that confers scientific degrees approves.

### **Article 16**

The language of mass media broadcasts is regulated by the Law on Radio and Television.

## **Article 17**

(1) Feature films, videofilms or their excerpts shown in public shall be provided with a voice-over, dubbed in the state language or shown with the original sound track and subtitles in the state language while observing accepted norms of the literary language.

(2) In the cases mentioned in this Article, subtitles in a foreign language are also permissible. Subtitles in the state language shall be placed in the foreground and shall not be smaller in size or less complete in content than the subtitles in the foreign language.

## **Article 18**

(1) In the Republic of Latvia, place names shall be created and used in the state language.

(2) The names of public institutions, voluntary organisations and enterprises (or companies) founded in the territory of Latvia shall be created and used in the state language except for cases prescribed by other laws.

(3) The names of events mentioned in Article 11 of this Law shall be created and used in the state language except for cases prescribed by other laws.

(4) In the territory of the Liv Shore, the place names and the names of public institutions, voluntary organisations, enterprises (or companies), as well as the names of events held in this territory, shall be created and used also in the Liv language.

(5) Creation and use of designations shall be prescribed by the Cabinet of Ministers regulations.

## **Article 19**

(1) Personal names shall be reproduced in accordance with the Latvian language traditions and shall be transliterated according to the accepted norms of the literary language while observing the requirements of paragraph 2 of this Article.

(2) In a person's passport or birth certificate, the person's name and surname reproduced in accordance with Latvian language norms may be supplemented by the historical form of the person's surname or the original form of the person's name in another language transliterated in the Latin alphabet if the person or the parents of a minor so desire and can provide verifying documents.

(3) The spelling and the identification of names and surnames, as well as the spelling and use in the Latvian language for personal names from other languages, shall be prescribed by the Cabinet of Ministers regulations.

## **Article 20**

(1) The text on stamps and seals, except those mentioned in paragraph 3 of this Article, shall be in the state language if stamps and seals are used on documents which, according to this Law or other normative acts, shall be in the state language.

(2) Texts on letterheads, except those mentioned in paragraph 3 of this Article, shall be in the state language if the letterheads are used on documents that, according to this Law or other normative acts, shall be in the state language.

(3) The text on stamps and seals, as well as the text on letterheads of state and municipal institutions, courts and agencies belonging to the judicial system, state and municipal enterprises and companies in which the state or a municipality holds the largest share of the capital, shall be only in the state language except for the cases referred to in paragraph 4 of this Article. This provision applies also to private institutions, organisations, enterprises (or companies), as well as to self-employed persons who under law or other normative acts perform certain public functions, if the performance of these public functions involves the use of stamps, seals or letterheads.

(4) The Cabinet of Ministers shall determine cases in which the institutions and persons mentioned in paragraph 3 of this Article may use also foreign languages along with the state language in creating and using stamps, seals and letterheads.

(5) If a foreign language is used along with the state language in the texts on stamps, seals and letterheads, the text in the state language shall be in the foreground and shall not be smaller in size or less complete in content than the text in a foreign language.

## **Article 21**

(1) Information intended for the public provided by state and municipal institutions, courts and agencies belonging to the judicial system, state and municipal enterprises and companies in which the state or a municipality holds the largest share of the capital shall be only in the state language except for cases provided for by paragraph 5 of this Article. This provision shall apply also to private institutions, organisations, enterprises (or companies), as well as to self-employed persons who under law or other normative acts perform

certain public functions, if the performance of these functions involves the providing of information.

(2) Information on labels and markings on goods manufactured in Latvia, user instructions, inscriptions on the manufactured product and on its packaging or container shall be in the state language. In cases when a foreign language is used along with the state language, the text in the state language shall be placed in the foreground and shall not be smaller in size or less complete in content than the text in the foreign language. These requirements do not apply to goods meant for export.

(3) If the markings, user instructions, warranties or technical certificates of imported goods are in a foreign language, a translation of the above information in the state language shall be attached to every imported item.

(4) Information on signs, billboards, posters, placards, announcements and any other notices shall be in the state language if it concerns legitimate public interests and is meant to inform the public in places accessible to the public, except for cases provided by paragraph 5 of this Article.

(5) Taking into account the purpose of this Law and the basic principle of language use as provide by Article 2 of this Law, the Cabinet of Ministers shall determine cases when the use of a foreign language along with the state language is permissible in information intended to inform the public in places accessible to the public.

(6) The Cabinet of Ministers shall also determine the cases when the institutions and persons mentioned in paragraph 1 of this Article may provide information in a foreign language and set the procedure for using the languages in information mentioned in paragraphs 1, 2, 3, and 4 of this Article.

(7) If a foreign language is used along with the state language in information, the text in the state language shall be in the foreground and shall not be smaller in size or less complete in content than the text in the foreign language.

## **Article 22**

(1) Standardised terminology shall be used in specialised teaching materials, in technical documents and office documents. The creation and use of terms shall be prescribed by the Terminology Commission of the Latvian Academy of Sciences (hereafter, the Terminology Commission). New terms and their definition standards may be used in official communications only after their approval by the Terminology Commission and publication in the newspaper "Latvijas Vēstnesis".

(2) The Statutes of the Terminology Commission shall be approved by the Cabinet of Ministers.

### **Article 23**

(1) In official communications, the Latvian language shall be used in accordance with the norms of the literary language.

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

(3) The Statutes of the Commission of the Latvian Language Experts and the norms of the Latvian literary language shall be approved by the Cabinet of Ministers.

### **Article 24**

(1) It shall be the duty of state and municipal institutions to provide material resources for the research, cultivation and development of the Latvian language.

(2) The state shall ensure the formulation of the state language policy which shall include scientific research, protection and teaching of the Latvian language; which shall augment the role of the Latvian language in the national economy; and which shall promote individual and public awareness of the language as a national value.

### **Article 25**

Persons who have violated the provisions of this Law shall be held liable in accordance with the procedure set by law.

### **Article 26**

(1) The State Language Centre shall monitor the observance of this Law in the Republic of Latvia.

(2) The State Language Centre shall be subordinate to the Ministry of Justice, and Statutes of the Centre shall be approved by the Cabinet of Ministers.

The Law was adopted by the Saeima on 9 December 1999.