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#rolreport2025

LIBERTIES

RULE OF LAW REPORT

2025



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LATVIA

FOREWORD

This country report is part of the Liberties Rule of Law Report 2025, which is the sixth annual report on the state of rule of law in the European Union (EU) published by the Civil Liberties Union for Europe (Liberties). Liberties is a non-governmental organisation (NGO) promoting the civil liberties of everyone in the EU, and it is built on a network of national civil liberties NGOs from across the EU. Currently, we have member organisations in Belgium, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Croatia, Estonia, France, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, the Netherlands, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain and Sweden, as well as a contributing partner organisation in Greece.

Liberties, together with its members and partner organisations, carries out advocacy, campaigning and public education activities to explain what the rule of law is, what the EU and national governments are doing to protect or harm it, and gathers public support to press leaders at EU and national level to fully respect, promote and protect our basic rights and values.

The 2025 report was drafted by Liberties and its member and partner organisations, and it covers the situation during 2024. It is a ‘shadow report’ to the European Commission’s annual rule of law audit. As such, its purpose is to provide the European Commission with reliable information and analysis from the ground to feed its own rule of law reports, and to provide an independent analysis of the state of the rule of law in the EU in its own right.

Liberties’ report represents the most in-depth reporting exercise carried out to date by an NGO network to map developments in a wide range of areas connected to the rule of law in the EU. The 2025 report includes 21 country reports that follow a common structure, mirroring and expanding on the priority areas and indicators identified by the European Commission for its annual rule of law monitoring cycle. Over forty member and local partner organisations contributed to the compilation of these country reports.

[Download the full Liberties Rule of Law Report 2025 here.](#)

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LATVIA

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Latvian Centre for Human Rights



The Latvian Centre for Human Rights (LCHR) was established in 1993 as an independent non-governmental organisation. Over three decades LCHR has worked with integration (minority rights and promotion of tolerance) issues, elimination of discrimination and hate crimes/speech, asylum, migration and fundamental rights issues, as well as human rights observation in closed institutions (prisons, immigration detention facilities).

LCHR conducts human rights monitoring, research and policy analysis, trains different target groups, and provides legal aid to victims of human rights violations, including their representation before domestic and international courts. The LCHR provides expert opinions both locally (to government, parliament, media, educational institutions, courts, and lawyers), as well as internationally. The LCHR is involved in advocacy for change, ranging from raising public awareness to specific policy or legislative change.

KEY CONCERNS

Justice System

Perceived judicial independence among the general public in Latvia continues to be average, although it is higher among younger people and lower among national minorities.

There remain difficulties in attracting assistant judges due to uncompetitive salaries and low motivation, resulting in a high turnover rate, especially in Riga, where it reaches up to 41% annually. A 6% raise has been planned for 2025.

The Law on Judicial Academy came into force on 1 November 2024, and the Judicial Academy will start operating on 1 January 2025. The Judicial Academy will be responsible for the training of judges, prosecutors, and court staff.

The level of digitalisation of the judiciary remains high.

There has been no progress in taking measures to ensure adequate safeguards against undue political influence in the appointment of Supreme Court judges, taking into account European standards on judicial appointments.

Anti-Corruption Framework

On 5 September 2024, the Saeima rejected proposed amendments¹ to the Criminal Law, which aimed to establish criminal liability for illegal agreements, including price-fixing, in public procurement.

On 12 December 2024, the Saeima amended the ‘Law on Prevention of Conflict of Interest in the Activities of Public Officials’.² These amendments introduce strict limitations on holding multiple positions by senior public officials in state and municipal-owned enterprises, companies controlled by public entities and special economic zones and freeports. The amendments have been lauded as a significant milestone in promoting good governance and transparency in Latvia and reducing the potential for political influence.

Some work has continued on the implementation of the legislation on lobbying, however, no special lobby register has been set up yet.

Media Environment and Media Freedom

On 4 December, the Latvian Association of Journalists (LŽA) announced it has created a platform for anyone, including journalists themselves, to report hate speech, violence, harassment, and intimidation against journalists and other media workers on social media or in everyday life.

1 The amendments were proposed by an MP.

2 Saeima (2024), Law on Prevention of Conflict of Interest in the Activities of Public Officials, (*Grozījumi likumā “Par interešu konfliktu novēršanu valsts amatpersonu darbībā”*).

Checks and Balances

The Parliament criminalised influencing the election process using deep-fake technology and approved amendments to the Pre-Election Campaign Law,³ allowing the use of AI in political campaigns and extending the powers of the Corruption Prevention and Combating Bureau.



Civic Space

Latvian Civic Alliance has noted a significant deterioration in access to funding for CSOs compared to the previous year. It criticised attempts by authorities to legislate that the CSOs engaged in economic activities would be required to pay corporate income tax.⁴

Disregard of Human Rights Obligations and Other Systemic Issues Affecting the Rule of Law Environment

In a European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) case against Latvia, Article 46 has been invoked for the first time, requiring Latvia to address the systemic issue of informal prison hierarchies, including inter-prisoner violence.

State of play (versus 2024)

-  Justice system
Anti-corruption framework
-  Media Environment and Media Freedom
Checks and balances
-  Civic Space
-  Human Rights

Legend

Regression

No progress

Progress



3 Likumi.lv (2024), Amendments to the Pre-Election Campaign Law (*Grozījumi Priekšvēlēšanu aģitācijas likumā*), 6 November 2024.

4 Latvian Civic Alliance (2025), *Report on Monitoring and Civic Space of the Latvian Civil Society (Latvijas pilsoniskās sabiedrības monitoringa un pilsoniskās telpas ziņojums)*, p.9.

JUSTICE SYSTEM



Key recommendations

- *National authorities should take measures to ensure adequate safeguards against undue political influence in the appointment of Supreme Court judges, taking into account European standards on judicial appointments; for the government and parliament to take legislative steps to protect the objectivity of future Supreme Court judge appointments, such as the obligation to state reasons and judicial review of appointment decisions.*
- *Revise the standard of the post of an assistant judge and clearly define the career development model of an assistant judge.*

Judicial independence

The level of perceived judicial independence in Latvia continues to be average among the general public, although it is higher among younger people and lower among national minorities. According to the survey⁵ on Media Literacy of the Latvian Population⁶ commissioned by the National Electronic Mass Media Council (Nacionālo elektronisko plašsaziņas līdzekļu padome), among all respondents 40.3% fully or tend to trust Latvia's judicial system; 35.1% neither trust nor distrust it, and 24.5% respondents tend to distrust or completely distrust it. Among national minority respondents, 30.1% fully or tend to trust Latvia's judicial system, 46.4% neither trust nor distrust it, and 21.4%

tend to distrust or completely distrust the judicial system. Trust in the judicial system is highest among young people (15-25 years of age) – 48.5% fully or tend to trust, 38.8% neither trust nor distrust, and 13.7% tend to distrust or completely distrust it. Among senior citizens (over 65) 38% fully or tend to trust it, 37.6% neither trust nor distrust, and 24.4% tend to distrust or completely distrust it.

The 2024 Rule of Law Report, in addition to the 2023 report, recommended Latvia “take measures to ensure adequate safeguards against due political influence in the appointment of Supreme Court judges, taking into account European standards on judicial

5 Quantitative (1559 respondents over 15, direct (personal) interviews) and qualitative survey (70 respondents, 9 and older).

6 Civitta (2024), [Pētījums par Latvijas iedzīvotāju medijpratību](#).

appointments”.⁷ There has been no progress in implementing the recommendation.

Appointment and selection of judges, prosecutors and court presidents

In March and July 2024,⁸ the Judicial Council amended and further specified the procedures for the nomination and appointment of court chairpersons, deputy chairpersons, and courthouse chairpersons. The amendments concern the composition of the commission and the criteria for evaluating candidates. There will be three main criteria for evaluating candidates: reputation and authority within the judicial system, professional competence and understanding of the judicial system, and vision for the future development of the court. There are also five additional criteria for which additional points can be awarded: additional education and foreign language skills, involvement in court work organisation, participation in judicial self-government institutions and judiciary associations, internships in other institutions, and activities outside of court work related to enhancing understanding of court operations.

Judges and prosecutors

Assistant judges

On 6 July 2024, the Judicial Council (Tieslietu padome)⁹ supported the Ministry of Justice’s proposed budget priorities for district (city) courts and regional courts for 2025 to 2028, which include a 6% salary increase for court employees. However, they noted that the proposed salary increases for first- and second-instance court employees are insufficient. Additional funding for priority measures over the next four years only provides for a 2.6% monthly salary increase for court employees.

The State Audit Control (Valsts kontrole) report on the ‘Availability and development of human resources in the courts of Latvia’¹⁰ published on 2 October 2024 concludes that the judicial system has been attempting to reform and develop the role of assistant judges for the past 20 years, but significant progress has yet to be made. There are no set educational requirements for the position, and the responsibilities and competences of assistant judges have not been expanded. This has led to uncompetitive salaries, low motivation among

7 2024 Rule of Law Report, *Country Chapter on the rule of law situation in Latvia*, p. 2; 2023 Rule of Law Report, *Country Chapter on the rule of law situation in Latvia*, p. 2.

8 Tieslietu Padome (2024), *Grozījumi tiesas priekšsēdētāja, vietnieka un tiesu nama priekšsēdētāja iecelšanas kārtībā*, 26 March 2024.

9 Latvijas Vēstnesis (2024), ‘Aigars Strupiņš: Tiesu sistēmas efektīva darbība nav iespējama bez kvalitatīva un noturīga atbalsta personāla’ 19 September 2024; Latvijas Vēstnesis (2024), *Paredzētais mēnešalgu palielinājums tiesu darbiniekiem 6 % apmērā nenodrošinās konkurētspējīgu atbildību juridisko profesiju tirgū*, 6 July 2024.

10 The State Audit Office of the Republic of Latvia (2024), *Availability and development of human resources in the courts of Latvia*, 2 October 2024.

current employees, and difficulty in attracting new qualified staff, resulting in a high turnover rate, especially in Riga, where turnover reaches up to 41% annually. The audit found that the judicial system has not effectively developed the post of assistant judge.

Quality of justice

Accessibility of courts (e.g. court fees, legal aid, language)

To promote understanding among Latvian residents about the necessity of early resolution of legal issues, their rights, and the available legal assistance support mechanisms provided by the state, municipalities, and non-governmental organisations, the Ministry of Justice, in cooperation with the Court Administration, is implementing the project 'Access to Justice'.¹¹ On 28 November 2024, the project launch event took place to introduce the planned activities and discuss the currently available legal assistance in Latvia and the challenges to strengthening it.

The study 'Access to Justice in Latvia' published in 2020 concluded that Latvia needs to develop a state-provided legal assistance system by undertaking reforms and making it more efficient, as well as actively informing and educating the public about the available options and solutions. Almost one-third of

respondents (32.6%) in the study indicated that they would prefer to use state-provided legal assistance for resolving their legal problems. However, in reality, only 3% of respondents actually sought it. Among those surveyed who had not sought state-provided legal assistance, 70% were unaware of such an option. The general public remains largely uninformed about mediation and how it can be used to resolve legal issues. Only 13% of survey participants knew what mediation is, while 63% had not heard of it at all.

The project will be implemented over three years until 30 June 2027 and will include:

- Reforming and improving the state-provided legal assistance system by developing a mixed model for initial legal assistance and integrating mediation.
- Developing digital solutions, such as guides for initial legal assistance and state-provided legal assistance in various case categories.
- Informing and educating the public, especially vulnerable groups, about state-provided legal assistance services and the importance of early detection and resolution of legal issues.

11 The Ministry of Justice utilises funds allocated for the implementation of the European Union cohesion policy program. The total project cost is €1,099,104, of which the European Social Fund Plus provides €934,238, and the state budget funding is €164,866. See Latvijas Vēstnesis (2024), [Stiprinās iedzīvotāju pieejamību juridiskajai palīdzībai un atbalsta mehānismiem](#), 29 November 2024.

- Enhancing the skills and competencies of those within the state-provided legal assistance system through training programs.

The project has already begun, with training for legal aid providers on communication with vulnerable groups. Experts from the Court Administration have studied Finland and Iceland's experiences providing state legal aid, organising mediation, and supporting crime victims.

Resources of the judiciary (human/financial/material)

On 2 October, the State Audit Office published the report 'Availability and Development of Human Resources in the Courts of Latvia'.¹² The report concludes that while prerequisites for professional and competent human resources in district and regional courts have been established, the pace of development is too slow, potentially leading to a crisis. Key issues include a lack of long-term strategic vision, increasing judicial vacancies, and the potential retirement of over 28% of current judges in the next few years. The situation is particularly critical for judges specialising in

land register cases, and court employees face high turnover.

The audit also highlights that training attendance among judges is insufficient, with every tenth judge attending training less than once a year, despite ongoing legal changes. The assistant judge post has not been effectively developed, resulting in high turnover, especially in Riga, where it reaches up to 41% annually. The audit provides several recommendations to the Ministry of Justice. As a result of their implementation, the improvement of human resource management and development is expected in the courts of Latvia, including: improved planning of the number of judges;¹³ increased competence and responsibility of assistant judges; increased motivation of assistant judges to work in court and decreased employee turnover; facilitated and increased motivation of judges to attend training.

In September 2024 the Chairperson of the Supreme Court¹⁴ spoke of 67 vacant judge positions in Latvian courts, and the number of vacancies could increase to 150 in the coming years. According to him, this will arise as many judges are due to retire in the coming years,

12 The State Audit Office of the Republic of Latvia (2024), *Availability and development of human resources in the courts of Latvia*, 2 October 2024.

13 According to the State Audit Report, the last time the parliament determined the number of judges of district (city) courts and regional courts was on 2 June 2016. The budget is planned according to the determined number of judges instead of the actual one. The courts with the correct number of judges (492 judges) are able to consider the received cases effectively, and the backlog of pending cases is decreasing in general.

14 Jurista Vārds (2024), Aigars Strupiņš: The effective functioning of the judicial system is not possible without a quality and stable support staff (*Aigars Strupiņš: Tiesu sistēmas efektīva darbība nav iespējama bez kvalitatīva un noturīga atbalsta personāla*), 20 September 2024.

and the best assistant judges are leaving for the private sector. According to the State Audit Control, in 2023, 17% of judges were over 61, while in 2027 the share will rise to 28%.

At the same time, the representatives of the Judicial Council have, in turn, emphasised that not all judges retire at the age of 65, as they have the option to continue working until the age of 70. The number of criminal cases in courts has nearly halved in recent years, significantly easing the workload for judges, therefore making it unnecessary to fill all vacant positions. The Council emphasised that it will propose a reduction in the number of judges in Latvia, as the previously established number of judges no longer corresponds to the current situation.

Training of justice professionals (including judges, prosecutors, lawyers, court staff)

The Law on Judicial Academy came into force on 1 November 2024¹⁵ as did the related amendments to the law ‘On Judiciary’.¹⁶ These amendments aim to encourage judges to lead training events and motivate judges to take on mentoring roles. The Judicial Academy plans to start its work on 1 January 2025.

The Judicial Academy will be managed and represented by its director, who will be appointed by the Cabinet of Ministers (institutional oversight) for a term of five years. The candidate

for the position of director of the Judicial Academy will be nominated by the Minister of Justice (content oversight) after the proposal of the Judicial Council. It will provide training for judges, prosecutors, and investigators. The Judicial Academy is the priority project of the Ministry of Justice within the EU Resilience and Recovery Facility. See also the conclusions of the State Audit Report in the previous section concerning training.

Digitalisation (e.g. use of digital technology, particularly electronic communication tools, within the justice system and with court users, including resilience of justice systems in COVID-19 pandemic)

In Latvia, the level of digitalisation of the judiciary remains high. Significant improvements have been made to the technical infrastructure of the courts.¹⁷ Monitors have been replaced in all courtrooms, and computers have been replaced in half. Overall, more than 300 laptops, 400 monitors, 23 video conferencing devices, and 70 wireless internet access points have been installed. A pilot project has also been launched to improve the audio equipment in courtrooms, to ensure higher quality audio recordings and make it easier to convert them into written text.

15 Law on Judicial Academy (*Tieslietu akadēmijas likums*), 1 November 2024.

16 Amendments to the Law on Judiciary (*Grozījumi likumā “Par tiesu varu”*), 24 October 2024.

17 Court Administration (2024), ‘Judicial Council discusses the development of e-case and draft court communication guidelines’ (*Tieslietu padomē apspriež e-lietas attīstību un tiesu komunikācijas vadlīnijas*), 13 December 2024.

Other

There are no updates in 2024 concerning the work of the Ministry of Justice on amendments pertaining to the Economic Court's competence and resources, and no longer having judges hear both criminal and civil cases.

Fairness and efficiency of the justice system

Length of proceedings

The Administrative Cases Department¹⁸ has worked to reduce the backlog of old cases, particularly those pending for an extended period. At the end of 2021, there were 167 cases pending for more than two years. By 31 December 2024, this number had reduced to 31 cases. In 2023, the average length of a case heard in cassation procedure and ending with a judgment was 32 months. In 2024, this average decreased to 23.9 months. Refusal to review a case in the cassation procedure was decided within 4.3 months on average. In 2024, the department referred four cases to the European Court of Justice for a preliminary ruling, compared to three cases in 2023.

Despite predictions of a decrease in incoming cases, the Senate's Criminal Cases Department¹⁹ received 51 more cases in 2024 compared with 2023. The average case processing time was reduced by 20 days, with decisions on initiating cassation proceedings made in an average of 2.3 months, and cases reviewed in cassation within 9 months. By the end of 2024, only one case from 2023 remained unresolved. Among other cases, the so-called 'Zolitūde case'²⁰ was reviewed in 2024, which included a cassation protest and 32 cassation complaints.

18 Supreme Court of the Republic of Latvia (2025), 'In the Administrative Affairs Department, all resources are concentrated on clearing the backlog of old cases' (*Administratīvo lietu departamentā visi resursi koncentrēti seno lietu atlikuma samazināšanai*), 20 January 2025.

19 Supreme Court of the Republic of Latvia (2025), 'The Criminal Cases Department has improved the method for handling complex cases' (*Krimināllietu departaments pilnveidojis apjomīgu lietu izskatīšanas metodi*), 20 January 2025.

20 The Zolitūde case refers to the tragic collapse of the roof of the Maxima supermarket in Zolitūde, Latvia, on 21 November 2013, which resulted in the deaths of 54 people. The case involved multiple defendants, including construction engineers, architects, and officials, and it has been one of the most complex and high-profile criminal cases in Latvia's history.

ANTI-CORRUPTION FRAMEWORK

Key recommendations

- *To take concrete steps to set up a special lobby register*
- *To establish criminal liability for prohibited agreements, including price-fixing, in public procurement*
- *To provide reasonable compensation if the information provided by a whistleblower brings significant benefits to society*

Framework to prevent corruption

General transparency of public decision-making (including public access to information such as lobbying, asset disclosure rules and transparency of political party financing)

On 26 September 2024, the Saeima (parliament) approved amendments to the Law on Financing of Political Organisations (Parties) in the final reading, keeping the amount of state funding for political parties at the 2024²¹ level for the year 2025. According to Section 7.4, Part 1 of the law, political parties may use the allocated state budget funding for three main purposes: maintaining the party's office and staff; supporting the party's activities (e.g., seminars, congresses, conferences, research, surveys, youth organisation events, consultations); communicating with the public, including political campaigning. Thirteen political

parties and associations are entitled to receive state funding during 2023-2026.

On 11 June 2024, the Office of Combatting and Preventing Corruption (KNAB) adopted a decision to suspend state budget funding for the political party National Alliance 'All for Latvia!' – 'For Fatherland and Freedom/LNNK' for one year. KNAB found that the political party exceeded the allowable state budget funding limit for communication with the public and political campaigning by €210,673.59 in 2022. The political party 'Latvian Russian Union' did not receive state budget funding in either 2023 or 2024 because it did not comply with the requirement set out in Section 7.2, Part 1 of the law, which mandates that the party must have an open bank account in a credit institution registered in Latvia.

21 Minimum monthly salary in 2024 is €700, while in 2025 it will be raised to €740.

Rules on preventing conflicts of interest in the public sector

To reduce the risks of conflicts of interest and corruption, and to improve the efficiency of public administration, on 12 December 2024, the Saeima adopted amendments to the ‘Law on Prevention of Conflict of Interest in the Activities of Public Officials’.²² These amendments introduce strict limitations on holding multiple positions by senior public officials in state and municipal-owned enterprises, companies controlled by public entities and special economic zones and freeports. The Foreign Investors’ Council in Latvia (FICIL) lauded the amendments as a significant milestone in promoting good governance and transparency in Latvia and reducing the potential for political influence.²³

Public officials will only be allowed to hold board member positions, which involve strategic decision-making and overseeing the work of the board, in exceptional cases where it is necessary to ensure the operational capacity of the capital company. In such cases, the appointment can be made for a limited period of up to one year, with reappointment possible only after a one-year break. It is estimated that

the time required to perform the duties of a board member, considering the specific nature of the role, is approximately 30% of full-time working hours.

The amendments to the law also reduce the number of additional positions allowed for senior officials.²⁴ Previously, heads of state institutions and their deputies could combine their main job with two additional paid or otherwise compensated positions in public institutions. They will now be allowed to hold only one additional paid or compensated position in public institutions.

Stricter requirements will be applied to the evaluation of additional positions for senior state and municipal officials, as well as board and council members of capital companies. In these cases, permissions will no longer be granted based solely on resolutions; each request for combining positions will be evaluated, and the permission will be justified. The amendments came into force on 11 January 2025. Officials who currently hold positions that do not comply with the new conditions will need to terminate such arrangements by 31 August 2025. These reforms were initiated based on findings from a State Audit Office

22 Saeima (2024), Law on Prevention of Conflict of Interest in the Activities of Public Officials (*Grozījumi likumā “Par interešu konflikta novēršanu valsts amatpersonu darbībā”*).

23 FICIL (2024), *FICIL welcomes the amendments adopted by the Saeima to prevent conflicts of interest in the activities of public officials.*, 12 December 2024.

24 These rules apply to: head of the Presidential Chancellery and their deputy, Secretary General of the Saeima Administration, heads of direct administrative institutions and their deputies, municipal council chairpersons and their deputies, who hold paid positions in the municipality, municipal executive directors and their deputies, board members of state and municipal capital companies.

review, which highlighted the challenges and risks posed by holding multiple positions simultaneously.

Measures in place to ensure whistleblower protection and encourage reporting of corruption

According to a report by the State Chancellery²⁵ approved by the government on 21 January 2025, since the implementation of the Whistleblower Law in Latvia on 1 May 2019, a total of 652 whistleblower reports were received by the end of 2023. The main issues reported include tax evasion, corruption, misconduct by officials, and the misuse of public funds. Despite heightened awareness, a significant number of reports remain improperly filed, often pertaining to personal disputes or being unrelated to a professional setting. Of 2,314 submitted reports, only 652 conformed to the criteria for whistleblower reports.

From 1 May 2019 to 31 December 2023, whistleblowers approached various institutions, e.g. the Corruption Prevention and Combating

Bureau (KNAB), the State Revenue Service, the State Labour Inspectorate, the State Police, the State Language Centre, the Health Inspectorate, the Prosecutor's Office, the State Audit Office, the Riga City Municipality, the Ministry of Smart Administration and Regional Development, the Ministry of Education and Science, and the Ministry of Welfare. The report recommends that the KNAB assume responsibility for whistleblowing matters from 1 January 2026, due to its extensive experience and independence. The report also suggests reinforcing the whistleblower contact point, focusing on public education, and considering enhanced support and compensation for whistleblowers. Until now the whistleblower contact point has been the State Chancellery, which is not an independent institution. According to Delna (Transparency International), Latvia's Whistleblowing Law, effective since 1 May 2019, has not been uniformly understood and consistently applied in court rulings.²⁶ Even after five years, there is still confusion about the law's application and whistleblower protection. Delna analysed several whistleblowing court cases²⁷ and concluded that court decisions

25 Cabinet of Ministers (2025), 'During the first five years of the law, 652 whistleblower reports were received' (*Likuma pirmo piecu gadu laikā saņemti 652 trauksmes cēlēju ziņojumi*), 21 January 2025, <https://www.mk.gov.lv/lv/jaunums/likuma-pirmo-piecu-gadu-laika-sanemti-652-trauksmes-celeju-zinojumi>.

26 Latvijas Vēstnesis (2024), "'Delna": There is a lack of unified understanding of whistleblower protection in judicial practice' (*"Delna": Tiesu praksē trūkst vienotas izpratnes par trauksmes cēlēju aizsardzību*), 6 November 2024.

27 Public Whistleblowing Case: A municipal council deputy publicly disclosed a colleague's violation, leading to a defamation lawsuit. The court did not recognise him as a whistleblower because he did not follow the formal procedure - because he did not approach the competent authority with a request to recognise him as a whistleblower. Board Member Whistleblower Case: A board member raised concerns publicly about a possible violation. He was pressured to resign, and the court did not recognise his whistleblower rights, interpreting the case under commercial law. Temporary Protection Case: A dismissed employee sued for being fired due to whistleblowing. The court granted temporary protection, and both initial and appellate courts upheld this decision, recognising the importance of protecting whistleblowers.

show inconsistent understanding among judges about the whistleblowing system, which creates uncertainty for whistleblowers.

List the sectors with high-risks of corruption in your country and list the relevant measures taken/envisaged for preventing corruption and conflicts of interest in these sectors. (e.g. public procurement, health-care, other)

In an online discussion on 11 October 2024 about parliament's refusal to criminalise prohibited agreements by public companies, including cartels, especially in public procurement, the Prosecutor General²⁸ indicated "that foreign construction [companies] do not enter Latvia because, as a result of the cartel, everything has already been divided among local companies. Five construction companies and the beneficiary – one family, two surnames – also appear in the road transport business".²⁹

Any other relevant measures to prevent corruption in public and private sector

Events in Latvian municipalities involving unethical behaviour by municipal leaders, deputies, and other council employees have drawn the attention of the Delna to municipal ethics codes. In 2024, Delna developed a nine-step approach – a handbook for creating ethical regulations.³⁰ Prior to the publication of the handbook, Delna undertook an evaluation of the ethics codes of 38 municipalities.³¹ A previous evaluation of the municipal ethics codes took place in 2012 under the guidance of KNAB.

In 2023, Delna sent a list of 36 tasks related to anti-corruption and good governance to Saeima deputies, developed in collaboration with experts. By September 2024, Delna concluded that none of the 36 recommendations had been fully implemented, only five had been partially implemented, and no action had been taken on 31 proposals. Therefore, Delna assesses the 14th Saeima's progress in anti-corruption work as 'deliberate stagnation'.³²

According to Delna, it is essential to publish sub-threshold procurement contracts and

28 Delna (2024), 'Personal liability for participation in cartels – ensuring fair business practices' (*Personīga atbildība par dalību kartelos – lai nodrošinātu godīgu uzņēmējdarbību*), 16 October 2024, online discussion.

29 Delna (2024), 'Personal liability for participation in cartels – ensuring fair business practices' (*Personīga atbildība par dalību kartelos – lai nodrošinātu godīgu uzņēmējdarbību*), 16 October 2024, online discussion.

30 Delna (2024), *Evaluation of ethics regulations in municipalities (Izvērtējums: ētikas regulējums pašvaldībās)*, 2024.

31 Delna (2024), *Ethics code in 9 steps: a handbook for developing ethics regulation (Ētikas kodekss 9 soļos: rokasgrāmata ētika regulējuma izstrādei)*, 2024.

32 Latvijas Vēstnesis (2024), "'Delna': Latvia's fight against corruption is hindered by a lack of political will" (*"Delna": Latvijas cīņu pret korupciju kavē politiskās gribas trūkums*), 30 October 2024.

standardise their procedures in the Public Procurement Law. Anti-corruption organisations have called for expanding the competence of the Procurement Monitoring Bureau to review third-party submissions regarding possible misconduct in public procurements. Establishing criminal liability for prohibited agreements in public procurement would help prevent corrupt activities in both the public and private sectors. Currently, under KNAB law, bribery only applies to illegal actions by public officials, but this problem also exists in the private sector. An underutilised tool in fighting corruption is the systematic review of state officials' annual income declarations. It is proposed to ensure an annual review of the Corruption Prevention and Combating Measures Plan for 2023–2025, informing the public about both achievements and shortcomings. One recommendation is to provide reasonable compensation if the information provided by a whistleblower brings significant benefits to society.

Investigation and prosecution of corruption

Criminalisation of corruption and related offences

On 5 September 2024, the Saeima rejected proposed amendments³³ to the Criminal Law, which aimed to establish criminal liability for prohibited agreements, including price-fixing in public procurement. The Competition Council has long drawn attention to the fact that individuals who organise cartels face no legal consequences, even though their actions hinder competition and lead to inefficient use of public funds. Administrative fines are not enough to deter violations that undermine fair competition. Despite extensive discussions about criminalising cartels since at least 2020, the proposal submitted by the Office of the Prosecutor General to the Cabinet of Ministers in May 2023, which envisages criminal liability for individuals for forming cartels,³⁴ has not been addressed by the government. Such amendments would help prevent corrupt activities in both the public and private sectors and facilitate the investigation of fraudulent criminal offences in public procurements. Regret about the rejection was voiced by the Office of the Prosecutor General,³⁵ Competition Council, KNAB, Foreign Investors' Council and anti-corruption NGOs.

33 The amendments were proposed by an MP.

34 A new Article 211.1, which would establish criminal liability for implementing prohibited agreements in public procurement.

35 Prokuratūra (2024), *Saeima noraida priekšlikumu noteikt kriminālatbildību par aizliegtu vienošanos īstenošanu publiskajos iepirkumos*, 5 September 2024.

On 11 October 2024, the Prosecutor General announced he had submitted a request to the

Prime Minister to address the amendments by the government.³⁶

MEDIA ENVIRONMENT AND MEDIA FREEDOM



Key recommendations

- *To take measures to improve public trust in media, specifically among minority groups*

Media and telecommunications authorities and bodies

On 1 October, the government approved the media policy guidelines for 2024-2027.³⁷ These guidelines focus on promoting media literacy, strengthening local media, and improving journalists' safety and skills. The guidelines, developed after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, link media policy to information space security and outline four key action areas: 1) Strong Media Environment: Ensuring public media reach diverse groups with quality content and promoting the financial independence of media; 2) Secure Media Environment: Enhancing journalists' safety and media preparedness for crises, improving media literacy among the population, 3) Independent Media Environment: Strengthening media freedom, transparency of media ownership,

and improving Latvia's World Press Freedom Index ranking, 4) Quality Media Environment: Promoting high professional standards and lifelong learning for media professionals, ensuring access to quality content. The planned funding is €55.306 million in 2024, €77.679 million in 2025, €67.665 million in 2026, and €66.695 million in 2027.

Public service media

Independence of public service media from governmental interference

In early April 2024, the merger of Latvian Radio and Latvian Television was launched, with the two state-owned companies merging to form LSM (Latvijas Sabiedriskais Medijs; Latvian Public Service Media), which is due to start operations on 1 January 2025.

36 Delna (2024), Personal liability for participation in cartels – to ensure fair competition (Personīga atbildība par dalību kartēļos – lai nodrošinātu godīgu uzņēmējdarbību), 16 October 2024.

37 LETA, New media policy guidelines commit to strengthening local media and promoting media literacy, 1 October 2024.

On 13 November, the Public Electronic Mass Media Council (SEPLP) approved the five-year term of office of the Board of the merged Latvian Public Service Media (LSM). The LSM Board has been elected for a five-year term and will start its work at the beginning of January 2025, when the new State JSC ‘Latvijas Sabiedriskais medijs’ will be registered.³⁸

In the beginning of 2025, the Latvian Public Service Media has 865 staff and has been assigned €51.339 million.³⁹

Public trust in media

According to the survey⁴⁰ on Media Literacy of the Latvian Population⁴¹ commissioned by the National Electronic Mass Media Council concerning trust in public service media (Latvian TV, Latvia Radio, public media platform lsm.lv) when asked, “To what extent do you believe that all the information you see/read is reliable”, 31.7% of the respondents find it fully or predominantly credible, 47.8% believe it to be partially credible, and 20.5% believe public media to be predominantly not credible or not credible at all. Trust in public media is low among respondents from a minority background: 14.1% believe public service media to be fully or predominantly credible, 47.9% say it is partially credible, and 36.4% find it

predominantly not credible or not credible at all. Among youth (15-25 years of age), 29.3% say it is fully or predominantly credible, 52.3% partially credible, and 18% find public service media predominantly not credible or not credible at all. Among senior citizens, trust in public service media stands at 33.8% fully or predominantly credible, 45.5% partially credible, and 20.5% predominantly not credible or not credible at all. Compared to the 2023 survey, public trust in media has slightly increased.

At the same time, the lack of trust in the media is reinforced by the widespread stereotype that the government controls media content, a belief held by 60% of the public. This perception is further fuelled by the similarity in news content across different media outlets, creating the impression that the media is subject to state influence and provides one-sided information. Consequently, the media is perceived as an instrument of the system.

In 2024, the issue of Russian-language media, particularly the place of Russian in public media, in Latvia remained a topic of intense debate and concern. According to the National Security Concept, the Latvian public media should completely transition to the Latvian language by 2026. The risks remain that Russian speakers will be deprived of a reliable

38 LSM (2024), ‘New Latvian Public Media Board Confirmed’, 13 November 2024.

39 TVNET (2024), ‘865 employees will work in the unified public media’ (*Vienotajā Latvijas Sabiedriskajā Medijā nākamā gada sākumā strādās 865 darbinieki*), 28 December 2024.

40 Quantitative (1559 respondents over 15, direct (personal) interviews) and qualitative survey (70 respondents, 9 and older).

41 Civitta (2024), *Pētījums par Latvijas iedzīvotāju medijpratību*.

source of news and information in their language, exposing them to the dangers of misinformation. In 2023, Reporters without Borders and their partners expressed their concern that this change risks depriving Russian speakers in Latvia of access to credible and fact-checked information, leaving them exposed to disinformation and propaganda, which is especially critical in light of the Russian war of aggression in Ukraine.

Since the Russian invasion of Ukraine, in an attempt to stem the Russian state propaganda, the National Electronic Mass Media Council (NEPLP) has also banned a total of 163, predominantly Russian Federation television channels in Latvia, and blocked access to more than 1,000 websites.⁴²

According to the 2024 Public Media Public Benefit Survey⁴³ public media reach at least 60% of all minorities in Latvia at least once a week. Meanwhile, 22% of Latvia's minority residents consume public media exclusively in Russian. According to the survey, the support for the decision to create public media content in Russian is higher among minority representatives than among Latvians. This issue is highly polarised in Latvian society depending on the respondent's ethnicity: among Latvians,

a minority or 29% express support for it, while among minorities, there is overwhelming support – 72%. The support is higher among the minority population reached by the public media in Russian – 85%, and slightly lower amongst those also reached by Latvian public media in Latvian – 70%, and lowest amongst the minority population not reached by public media – 63%.

On 26 November 2024, the Constitutional Court initiated a case⁴⁴ regarding the conformity of Section 3, Part 7 of the Public Electronic Media and its Management Law, and Section 6 of the 18 January 2024 law Amendments to the Public Electronic Media and its Management Law, which amends Section 8, Part 4 of the same law, with the preamble and Article 4 of the Constitution. The law mandates that public electronic media create programmes, fragments, and other services in minority languages to foster a sense of belonging to Latvia among all its residents, integrate society in Latvia as a nation-state, and deepen understanding of public, social, and cultural processes. The 18 January 2024 amendment allows public media to allocate broadcast time for programs in foreign languages, including subtitled films or theatre performances in the national language, if they produce multiple

42 LSM+ (2024), 'LTV: Blocking Russian propaganda is difficult in the digital age, 17 September 2024.

43 See Public Media Public Benefit Survey (*Latvijas sabiedrisko mediju sabiedriskais labums. 2024.gada aptaujas rezultāti*, 2024; Saulītis, A (2024), *Consumption Habits and Needs of Public Media by Latvia's Minority Residents (Latvijas mazākumtautību iedzīvotāju sabiedrisko mediju lietojuma paradumi un vajadzības)*.

44 Constitutional Court (2024), 'A case has been initiated regarding the use of minority languages in public electronic media' (*Ierosināta lieta par mazākumtautību valodu lietošanu sabiedriskajos elektroniskajos plašsaziņas līdzekļos*), 26 November 2024.

programmes. This amendment took effect on 1 January 2025.

Twenty MPs submitted an application to the Constitutional Court. They argue that the contested norms, which obligate public electronic media to produce a certain amount of radio and TV programs in minority languages, diminish the value of the Latvian language as the sole state language in a democratic society and endanger national security. Therefore, they claim these norms are incompatible with the Constitution's preamble and Article 4, which states that Latvian is the only state language.

Safety and protection of journalists and other media actors

Frequency of verbal and physical attacks

On 4 December, the Latvian Association of Journalists (LŽA) announced it has created a platform for anyone, including journalists themselves, to report hate speech, violence, harassment, and intimidation against journalists and other media workers on social media or in everyday life.⁴⁵ The platform features a special 'Alert Button'⁴⁶ to submit reports of violence, hate speech or harassment. Reporting can also be done anonymously. Journalists themselves and other people who have noticed

an incident can report it. The compilation of reports will, for the first time, create a factual basis that will provide evidence to the public, policymakers, law enforcement and international organisations. This will help to improve the protection of journalists. The move was taken following attacks on the Latvian Radio.

Smear campaigns

On 2 December, the Latvian Radio issued a statement denouncing attacks against journalists due to their ethnic background or citizenship as unacceptable.⁴⁷ It stated that "there have been deliberate and massive attacks on Latvian Radio, discrediting the journalists of the minority language broadcasting programs of Latvian Radio 4 (LR4) and questioning the compliance of the content created by colleagues with the editorial standards of the public media". The case concerned a radio programme hosted by a Russian journalist where an out-of-context phrase concerning the Latvian language was attributed by the listener to the program host and then published on the platform YouTube.

45 Latvian Journalists Association (2024), 'Calls to report hate speech and harassment against journalists and media workers' (*Aicina ziņot par naida runu un vajāšanu pret žurnālistiem un mediju darbiniekiem*), 4 December 2024.

46 Latvian Journalists Association (2024), Report about a threat to a journalist (*Ziņo par apdraudējumu žurnālistam*).

47 Latvijas Radio (2024), 'Latvian Radio: attacks against journalists due to their ethnic background or nationality, are unacceptable' (*Latvijas Radio: uzbrukumi žurnālistiem, kas balstīti piederībā tautībai vai valstspiederībai, ir nepienemami*), 2 December 2024.

Confidentiality and protection of journalistic sources (including whistleblower protection)

There have been two cases in 2024 in which the police went to court to demand that the journalists reveal their sources of information. Journalist Ilmārs Randers from *Latvijas Avīze* learned from his sources that the Riga Central Railway Station reconstruction project

had indeed been changed 100 times since its inception. His article on the financial deadlock of the Rail Baltic project appeared a few days before the State Audit Office published its report, which until then had limited access. The police acknowledge this as a violation of the law and demanded that the journalist reveal the source of the leak. The journalist has refused to disclose it.

CHECKS AND BALANCES

Independent authorities

The Ombudsman's Office reinstated the Anti-Discrimination Department, which began operations on 1 January 2024. Previously, this department operated from 2007 to 2009, but was dissolved in 2010 due to internal reorganisation. The aim of the new Anti-Discrimination Department is to prevent discrimination, promote public awareness of discrimination, provide legal assistance to victims of discrimination, and oversee the implementation of international and national anti-discrimination laws binding on Latvia.⁴⁸ The establishment of the new department is related to the adoption of two EU directives to strengthen the role of equality bodies across the European Union. For this purpose, the

Ombudsman was allocated additional funding of €330,803 from the state budget for 2024.⁴⁹

Electoral framework

Enabling environment for the exercise of the right to vote: voter registration systems, accessibility of polling stations, remote/e-voting arrangements, threats and intimidation

On 7 November, the Central Election Commission (CVK) approved the new ballot papers,⁵⁰ which will be used starting with the 2025 municipal elections. The visual appearance of the ballot papers and the filling conditions are changed. The main changes will affect voters who want to highlight a particular candidate or express a negative attitude towards

48 [Republic of Latvia Ombudsman](#).

49 [Ministry of Finance, Ombudsman's Office 2024](#).

50 [CVK \(2024\), 'Samples of new ballot papers approved'](#), 7 November 2024.

a candidate in the chosen list. Previously, voters could mark candidates they particularly supported with a '+' sign and simply cross out unwanted candidates. According to the new ballot paper model, there will be two different coloured boxes next to each candidate's name, and the voter can colour one – the green box if they particularly support a candidate, or the red box if they find the candidate unacceptable. The instructions for filling out the new ballot papers will be available at each polling station and in each voting booth. This change in the ballot paper model is necessary to ensure automatic vote counting in future elections and referendums. The same type of ballot papers will be used in the 2025 municipal elections, the 2026 Saeima elections, and the 2029 European Parliament elections.

Rules on political advertising and their enforcement

On 4 April 2024, the Constitutional Court opened a case⁵¹ brought by the political party 'Harmony' Social Democratic Party regarding the compliance of Article 5.1 of the Pre-election Campaign Law with Article 100 of the Constitution of the Republic of Latvia.

The contested norm regulates the use of language in pre-election campaigns. The application states that according to the contested norm, pre-election campaigning can only be

conducted in the state [Latvian] language (including the Latgalian written language) or the Livonian language with a translation into the official languages of the European Union Member States. For this reason, the candidates and members of the political party who submitted the application cannot communicate with voters in a minority language that is more understandable to them but is not an official language of any European Union Member State. Such a prohibition negatively affects the diversity of opinions in political discourse. Therefore, the applicant believes that the contested norm infringes on the right to freedom of speech included in Article 100 of the Constitution.

On 9 May 2024, shortly before the elections to the European Parliament, the Saeima criminalised influencing the election process using deep-fake technology (Article 90.1).⁵² Creating or spreading false defamatory information about political parties or candidates to the Parliament, Municipal Council, or European Parliament, using deepfake technology during the pre-election campaign or on election day is punishable by imprisonment for up to five years, short-term imprisonment, probation supervision, or community service. The amendments came into force on 21 May.

On 26 September, the Saeima supplemented the Criminal Law with a new Article 90.2,

51 Constitutional Court of the Republic of Latvia (2024), 'A case has been initiated regarding the use of language in pre-election campaigning' (*Ierosināta lieta par valodas lietojumu priekšvēlēšanu aģitācijā*), Press release, 12 April 2024.

52 Likumi.lv (2024), Amendments to the Criminal Law (*Grozījumi Krimināllikumā*), 21 May 2024.

‘Influencing the process of electing, appointing, or confirming a state official in the Saeima using deepfake technology’.⁵³ It is punishable by imprisonment for up to five years, short-term imprisonment, probation supervision or community service. The amendments came into effect on 22 October.

On 24 October 2024, the Saeima approved amendments to the Pre-election Campaign Law,⁵⁴ allowing the use of AI in political campaigns and extending the powers of the Corruption Prevention and Combating Bureau (KNAB). Campaigners must now inform the public about AI-created campaign materials, which must be clearly labelled. Non-compliance can result in fines up to €700 for individuals and €7,100 for legal entities. The use of fake or anonymous social network accounts for campaign activities is also prohibited.

The changes also stipulate that the use of fake or anonymous social network accounts created by automated systems for any pre-election campaign activities in social networks or elsewhere on the internet will henceforth be prohibited. KNAB will cooperate with other responsible institutions, primarily the State Police, in identifying them. In the event KNAB detects the use of fake or anonymous social network accounts in pre-election campaigning, the affected person or KNAB will be able to apply to the operator of the social media platform in question with a demand to suspend the specific pre-election campaign activities. If it fails to cooperate, KNAB will be entitled to inform the Consumer Rights Protection Centre, which is empowered to refer such matters to the European Commission.

53 Likumi.lv (2024), Amendments to the Criminal Law (Grozījumi Krimināllikumā), 8 October 2024.

54 Likumi.lv (2024), Amendments to the Pre-Election Campaign Law (Grozījumi Priekšvēlēšanu aģitācijas likumā), 6 November 2024.

CIVIC SPACE

Key recommendations

- *Abandon the attempts to impose corporate income tax on civil society organisations (CSOs) that engage in economic activities.*
- *The Ministry of Justice should conduct an analysis of legal entities in the CSO sector, identifying organisations whose activities do not align with the essence of CSOs and who use the legal form for alternative reasons, including for tax optimisation. Consequently, these organisations should be required to change their legal form.⁵⁵*
- *Terminate criminal proceedings against Ieva Raubiško.*

Freedom of association

Freedom to determine objectives and activities, including the scope of operations

On 25 June, the government approved the Regulation on the Classification of Associations and Foundations.⁵⁶ The regulation mandates that starting from 1 July 2024, CSOs must indicate their area of activity according to the classification of the Register of Associations and Foundations. CSOs can choose up to five areas of activity from the 22 available options and can change these areas at any time by notifying the Register. Newly established CSOs will indicate their area of activity during

the registration process, while existing CSOs will do so upon submitting their 2024 annual report to the State Revenue Service (Valsts ieņēmumu dienests).

The purpose of the classifier is to provide a comprehensive overview of the CSO sector to analyse trends, areas of activity, financial, and other indicators. The Latvian Civic Alliance, an umbrella organisation for CSOs, previously highlighted the need for such a classifier, noting that the lack of a unified system hindered comprehensive data collection about CSO activities. This gap increased risk assessments for CSOs in their relations with financial institutions and limited targeted support when

55 Latvian Civic Alliance (2025), *Report on Monitoring and Civic Space of the Latvian Civil Society (Latvijas pilsoniskās sabiedrības monitoringa un pilsoniskās telpas ziņojums)*, 2025, p.44.

56 Ministru kabinets, noteikumi Nr. 398, *Biedrību un nodibinājumu klasificēšanas noteikumi*, adopted on 25 June 2024.

necessary, such as identifying potential recipients of support.⁵⁷ Previously, it was not mandatory for CSOs to indicate their area of activity according to a classifier, and many CSOs were unable to categorise themselves because the relevant category did not exist.

Financing framework for CSOs, including availability of and access to public funding, rules on fundraising, rules on foreign funding, tax regulations (e.g. tax advantages for organisations with charitable or public benefit status, eligibility to receive donations via citizens' allocation of income tax to charitable causes, eligibility to use public amenities at low or no cost, etc.)

In August 2024, Civic Alliance Latvia (Latvijas Pilsoniskā alianse) and over 120 other civil society organisations (CSOs) raised concerns about a draft law proposed by the Ministry of Finance (Finanšu Ministrija). The draft stipulated that CSOs engaged in economic activities would be required to pay corporate income tax (CIT). Civic Alliance Latvia (LPA) argued that CSOs do not operate for profit but rely on economic activities as an additional source of funding for their core missions. LPA emphasised that imposing CIT on CSOs would create financial and administrative burdens, hinder their ability to achieve their goals, and place

them at a disadvantage compared to businesses. On 28 November, the government suspended further work on the draft law in response to objections from CSOs and the need for more discussions on appropriate measures.⁵⁸

CSOs are allowed to conduct economic activities if they are carried out to achieve the purposes specified in the statutes. However, for many years, government institutions have regularly proposed new initiatives to restrict CSOs' ability to conduct economic activities, fearing hidden commercial motives. CSOs do not engage in economic activities for profit but for various other reasons: to achieve the organisation's goal, maintain and develop the organisation, due to insufficient public funding — projects, subsidies, grants, difficulty in attracting membership fees, donations, and other types of funding, or the amount is not sufficient for the organisation's core activities. Additionally, EU funds and other foreign fund project conditions require co-financing (which can reach up to 50%) and pre-financing (which can reach up to 70%), and to ensure this, income is necessary.⁵⁹

Other

In 2024, Latvian civil society organisations raised the alarm and criticised the European

57 Latvijas pilsoniskā alianse (2021), *Pētījums par pilsoniskās sabiedrības organizāciju sektoru Latvijā 2020–2024: Latvijas biedrību un nodibinājumu klasifikācijas problēmas un risinājumi*, 2021, p.7.

58 Latvijas pilsoniskā alianse, 'Memoranda padomes sēdē lemj pagarināt termiņu SLO likumprojekta grozījumiem, jo NVO neatbalsta šī brīža grozījumus', 28 November 2024.

59 Latvian Civic Alliance (2024), *Report on Monitoring and Civic Space of the Latvian Civil Society (Latvijas pilsoniskās sabiedrības monitoringa un pilsoniskās telpas ziņojums)*, 2024.

Commission's proposal for a directive,⁶⁰ which aims to regulate the representation of interests 'on behalf of third countries' and which NGOs consider equivalent to the so-called 'foreign agents' regulation. CSO pointed to concerns about threats to fundamental rights, potential discrimination and stigmatisation of civil society organisations, and emphasised the need for a comprehensive evaluation of the directive's impact.

Criminalisation of activities, including humanitarian or human rights work

Criminal proceedings against human rights defender Ieva Raubiško from the NGO I Want to Help Refugees (Gribu palīdzēt bēgļiem) continued in 2024. The trial began in February 2024,⁶¹ with Raubiško facing charges of organising the illegal movement of a group of people across the Belarus-Latvia border. The charges stem from assistance she provided to five asylum seekers who had been granted an interim measure by the ECtHR, instructing the Latvian government to refrain from pushing them back to Belarus and to provide basic humanitarian aid. Raubiško and her colleague Egils Grasmanis were detained by border guards while visiting the border area to ensure compliance with the ECtHR ruling. The trial is scheduled to continue in March 2025. Proceedings have been dropped against Grasmanis.

Freedom of peaceful assembly

Bans on protests

On 5 January 2024, the Riga municipality banned a planned picket in solidarity with Palestinians, organised by the unregistered group Movement for Free Palestine. The decision to ban the event was based on an assessment by the State Security Service (Valsts drošības dienests), which identified potential threats to public safety. The security service cited several risks, including the aggravation of international relations and harm to the country's international interests; increased societal division and polarisation of opinions regarding the ongoing military conflict in the Middle East; the possibility of criminal offences; and threats to general security and public order due to potential conflicts at the event, which could escalate from verbal disputes to physical violence.

Additional concerns included the organiser's inability to estimate the number of participants, provide details on how security would be managed, or specify the slogans to be used during the event. The municipality also noted that the slogan "From the River to the Sea, Palestine Will Be Free!" used by the organisers on social media had provoked negative and aggressive reactions online and could incite similar responses during the picket. The organiser appealed the ban in court, but the court of first instance upheld

60 Ibid.

61 ENG.LSM.LV (2024), '[Human rights activist accused of organising illegal border crossing in Latvia](#)', 3 October 2024.

the municipality's decision.⁶² The case is currently under appeal in the Supreme Court. Meanwhile, three other pickets in support of Palestinians were allowed and held on 17 February, 27 April, and 5 October 2024, each gathering approximately 100 participants.

Public participation

Rules on access to and participation in consultations and decision-making processes

The new Cabinet of Ministers Regulation No. 639, Procedures for Public Participation in the Development Planning Process drafted by the State Chancellery (Valsts Kanceleja), came into force on 17 October 2024.⁶³ This regulation aims to enhance opportunities for civil society representatives to participate in state and municipal development planning processes. The regulation designates the unified portal for drafting and coordinating legislative projects (TAP portal) as the central tool for implementing public participation. It mandates that participation must be ensured not only in development planning and legislative drafting but also in other initiatives of public significance, particularly in designing and implementing reforms and planning the use of public funds. The regulation emphasises making the participatory process more inclusive. For example, public administration institutions must consider the specific needs

of society by adhering to plain language principles, providing opportunities for remote participation, and organising consultations closer to the target groups. Additionally, the regulation encourages the use of modern public engagement methods, such as think tanks, the deliberative method, dialogue circles, and other innovative approaches to foster meaningful public involvement.

On 1 September 2024, the Local Government Referendum Law⁶⁴ came into effect, aiming to promote the participation of municipal residents in decision-making on local issues. It defines the matters on which a local government referendum can be initiated and held, the sources of funding for the referendum, and the procedure for initiating, conducting, and announcing its results. The law specifies that a local government referendum can be held on: the municipality's sustainable development strategy or its amendments; a council decision to initiate the construction of a new public building or object requiring an environmental impact assessment; and the dismissal of the council. The preparation and management of the local government referendum are handled by the relevant municipal election commission. Starting in 2025, municipalities in Latvia must allocate a portion of their budget to participatory budgeting — funding citizen initiatives. Residents in each municipality can submit and vote on ideas, and the most

62 Administrative district court, Judgement of 30 May 2024, case No. A420108224.

63 Ministru kabinets, noteikumi Nr. 639 *Sabiedrības līdzdalības kārtība attīstības plānošanas procesā*.

64 *Local Government Referendum Law*, 1 September 2024.

supported proposals must be implemented by the municipality.⁶⁵ According to the Municipal Law, from 2025, municipalities must allocate at least 0.5% of their average annual income from personal income tax and real estate tax to participatory budgeting. However, the Saeima, when reviewing the state budget for the next year, decided to allow municipalities to allocate less funding⁶⁶ to participatory budgeting until 2029. Thus, in 2025, municipalities must allocate at least 0.1% of these revenues, in 2026 at least 0.2%, in 2027 at least 0.3%, and in 2028 at least 0.4%.⁶⁷

According to the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Regional Development (VARAM), out of 43 municipalities, 16 have already implemented participatory budgeting, including the cities of Riga and Jelgava, and 14 other municipalities. According to the Latvian Association of Local and Regional Governments (LPS), 30 municipalities are currently either implementing participatory budgeting or have completed all the necessary steps to start it.

65 lvportals.lv. From 2025 – participatory budgeting in municipalities – mandatory (No 2025. gada līdzdalības budžets pašvaldībās – obligāts), 20 December 2024.

66 This is due to financial circumstances.

67 Likuma, 'Par valsts budžetu 2025. gadam un budžeta ietvaru 2025., 2026. un 2027. gadam'.

DISREGARD OF HUMAN RIGHTS OBLIGATIONS AND OTHER SYSTEMIC ISSUES AFFECTING THE RULE OF LAW ENVIRONMENT -

Key recommendations

- Undertake far-reaching measures to prevent inter-prisoner violence in the Latvian prison system, including pre-trial detention.
- Enact legislation by raising the prison service admission age to 50⁶⁸ for certain posts (e.g. guards, supervisors, etc.) to address the high number of vacancies in the prison system.
- Improve and enhance the competence of medical personnel in preventing ill-treatment.

Systemic human rights violations

Implementation of decisions by supranational courts, such as the Court of Justice of the EU and the European Court of Human Rights

On 11 January 2024, in the case *D. v. Latvia*,⁶⁹ the ECtHR found a violation of Article 3 of the Convention on Human Rights (prohibition of torture, inhuman and degrading treatment or punishment) due to state authorities' failure to protect the applicant from prohibited treatment. Between 2008 and 2017, the applicant served time in various prisons and complained of inhuman treatment because of his position at the lowest level of an informal prisoner

hierarchy. This hierarchy divided inmates into three castes: the '*blatnie*' (highest), the '*mužiki*' (middle), and the '*kreisie*' (lowest). The applicant was placed in the lowest caste due to the nature of his offence. His complaints were dismissed by the Prison Administration and domestic courts.

This is the first ECtHR case concerning Latvia where Article 46 has been applied, requiring Latvia to address the systemic issue of informal prison hierarchies, including the social segregation of 'lower caste' prisoners, their subservience to criminal authorities, and inter-prisoner violence. The ECtHR has outlined specific measures for Latvia's judicial system to comply with the judgment.

68 Currently, the service admission age is from 18 to 40.

69 ECtHR, *D. v. Latvia* ((Application no. 76680/17), 11 January 2024.

In October 2024, Ministry of Justice (Tieslietu ministrija) prepared a report,⁷⁰ which also highlights potential measures to address prison hierarchies. Those include prison staff capacity building measures, including four new staff training programmes in the new training centre; starting a pilot project – installing a prisoner contact person in one prison in 2025, with gradual expansion to all prisons, prison infrastructure improvement, including the accommodation of prisoners in the new Liepāja prison starting from spring 2026. On 1 September 2024, the law Amendments to the Latvian Penal Enforcement Code came into force, which led to the transition of the Latvian prison system into open and closed prisons.

On 22 January 2025, the Prison Administration Training Centre in Olaine was officially opened.⁷¹ The Centre includes classrooms, a conference hall, a library, a reading room, a dormitory with 40 double rooms for 80 trainees, sports facilities, and practical training rooms. Specific infrastructure has been created for prison staff to acquire practical skills, including a specially equipped close combat hall and a future gym. The Centre can train 150 employees simultaneously. Trainees will experience a prison-like environment, practising various scenarios that may arise during their duties. Training includes handling emergencies, crisis situations and entering and

exiting cells, ensuring that staff can perform confidently and safely. The first group of 30 trainees will start in February. The hope is to fill the current vacancies, which number 450. The construction of the new training centre began on 9 March 2023, and was completed by 3 December 2024. The project cost €9,097,052.66, with 85% funded by the Norwegian government and 15% by the Latvian state budget.

70 Ministry of Justice (2024), *Informative Report “On Action to Reduce Informal Prisoner Hierarchies Informatīvais ziņojums (“Par rīcību ieslodzīto neformālās hierarhijas mazināšanai ieslodzījuma vietās”)*.

71 Ministry of Justice (2025), ‘The new Prison Administration Training Center in Olaine has been opened – a significant step in improving the resocialization system’ (*Atklāts jaunais Ieslodzījuma vietu pārvaldes mācību centrs Olainē – nozīmīgs solis resocializācijas sistēmas pilnveidē*), 22 January 2025.

CONTACTS

Latvian Centre for Human Rights

The Latvian Centre for Human Rights (LCHR) was established in 1993 as an independent non-governmental organisation. Over three decades LCHR has worked with integration (minority rights and promotion of tolerance) issues, elimination of discrimination and hate crimes/speech, asylum, migration and fundamental rights issues, as well as human rights observation in closed institutions (prisons, immigration detention facilities).

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The Civil Liberties Union for Europe

The Civil Liberties Union for Europe (Liberties) is a non-governmental organisation promoting the civil liberties of everyone in the European Union. We are headquartered in Berlin and have a presence in Brussels. Liberties is built on a network of 21 national civil liberties NGOs from across the EU.

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