



LATVIJAS REPUBLIKAS
SAEIMA



■ Main building of the Saeima

Architecture and interior of the buildings of the Saeima

The buildings of the Parliament of the Republic of Latvia are located in Riga, the northwest part of Old Town along Jēkaba iela. Borders of this group of buildings are marked by Torņa iela, Aldaru iela, Mazā Trokšņu iela, and Klostera iela.

Main building of the Saeima

The main building of the Saeima is located on Jēkaba iela 11. It contains the Plenary Chamber, as well as offices of the Speaker and other members of the Presidium, other public officials and staff members of the Saeima. The main building of the Saeima is not only the workplace of MPs but also a prominent cultural monument. It has numerous magnificent rooms of historic significance that are used for receiving visitors, as well as for hosting meetings, conferences, and other activities.

The main building of the Saeima was constructed from 1863 to 1867 for the Livonian Knighthood according to the design by Robert August Pflug, a Baltic-German architect, and Jānis Frīdrihs Baumanis, the first academically educated Latvian architect. Over more than 160 years of its existence, the building has been reconstructed several times. The most significant reconstruction was done after the building was maliciously set on fire in 1921, which destroyed its interior, including the Plenary Chamber. The demolished parts of the building and the Plenary Chamber were restored according to the design by architect Eižens Laube and adapted to the needs of the Parliament of the Republic of Latvia.

The façade, as well as the lanterns, the decorative fence posts and chains, are distinctive features of Eclecticism. There

are two plaques by the main entrance: a plaque with the name of the Saeima and a commemorative plaque installed in honour of the 30th anniversary of the restoration of Latvia's independence and the adoption of the 4th May Declaration. The coat of arms of Latvia is placed above the entrance to the main building of the Saeima, while the façade features a statue of the mythological Latvian strongman *Lāčplēšis* (Bearslayer). In addition, a plaque dedicated to the centenary of the Saeima is located next to the Jēkaba iela entrance. The 1st Saeima convened for its first sitting on 7 November 1922 and embodied the trust of the people in their statehood, freedom, independence, and democracy. With the convocation of the Parliament, the fundamental law of the state of Latvia—the *Satversme*—came into force and laid down the state system and principles for exercising power.

The magnificent **Plenary Chamber** is the most significant room in the main building of the Saeima. This is where MPs gather for sittings to debate and adopt laws. The Chamber is divided into two parts—seating for the MPs and a visitors' gallery. The MPs' area acquired its current semi-circular shape of an amphitheatre only in 1998. The Plenary Chamber comprises seats for one hundred MPs, as well as special seats for the President of Latvia, the Prime Minister, ministers, and the Presidium of the Saeima. Dark brown panels cover the walls. Next to the Presidium seats, there are two flags: the flag of Latvia and the flag of the European Union, and on the wall above, there is an oak-carved coat of arms of the Republic of Latvia, restored according to photographs. In addition, the Chamber contains plaques with



■ Voting Room

the first two articles of the Constitution. The plaques are a symbolical reminder that Latvia is an independent democratic republic and that the sovereign power of the State of Latvia is vested in the people of Latvia. The splendid ceiling decorations, where antique ornaments are combined with traditional Latvian sun and oak-leaf motifs, have remained unchanged through history. Particularly attractive are the Neo-Renaissance doors with refined metal door handles, wood-carved beads and rosettes. In the visitors' gallery, the wall and ceiling décor, preserved from the late 19th century, features allegorical female figures. During the plenary sittings, the Saeima staff, journalists, and guests sit in the visitors' gallery.

Next to the Plenary Chamber there is the **Voting Room**, which was constructed only in the 1980s and acquired its current shape in the early 1990s. It was built in

the place of an inner courtyard. As evident from the name, MPs use the Voting Room to vote using ballot papers, for example, on the election of the President of Latvia or the Presidium of the Saeima. This room is also used for various events. There is a unique painting in the Voting Room—*The Flag of Latvia Made by Its People*. The artwork was created during the annual light festival *Staro Rīga* before Latvia's centenary celebration. As part of a special performance near the Saeima building, anyone could sign their name on the canvas to create this flag of Latvia together.

The **Red Room** used to be one of the most impressive examples of Neo-Gothic style in Riga. Originally, the Livonian Knighthood used it as a dining hall. This room has changed the most. The stained glass windows are decorated with traditional Latvian ornaments by artist Ludis Bērziņš. A gothic shaped oak fireplace used to warm this room. In its place, there is a candelabrum by Eduards Spravņiks in the shape of a traditional Latvian ornament—the tree of *Austra*, a mythological goddess. It is decorated with the coats of arms of 19 historical districts of Latvia. The candelabrum is lit twice a year—on 18 November, Latvia's Proclamation Day, and 4 May, which marks the restoration of Latvia's independence. The Red Room is a venue for Presidium meetings, international conferences, discussions, receptions, and other ceremonial events.

In the times of the Livonian Knighthood, the **Yellow Room** was known as the Ladies' Salon. In between Landtag meetings, it was used for parties and celebrations. Nowadays, this is the room where MPs give interviews and meet with guests of the Saeima. The décor of the room, with its characteristic rose motif, is in the style of Louis XVI. Eclectic-style furniture in this room has been preserved from the era of the Livonian Knighthood. The large mirror has also been preserved from the 19th century, while a portrait of Jānis Čakste, President of the People's Council and the Constitutional Assembly, and the first President of Latvia, hangs on the opposite wall, painted by Ritums Ivanovs.

The **Guest Room** is another function room of the Saeima. It contains allegorical paintings by the 19th century French painter Auguste Debay. During the wall restoration works in late 2017, wall paintings were revealed in the room. These paintings are unique as they feature multiple colours and have been created in freehand technique. There are few such Historicism era wall paintings of artistic value still remaining in Latvia. This is

where Saeima officials welcome foreign delegations. Meetings, ceremonial receptions, and press conferences are also held in this room.

During official visits, the Speaker or the Deputy Speakers welcome foreign ambassadors and guests in the **White Room**. Ceremonial events and press conferences are held there as well. The most striking part of the Neo-Rococo-style interior is the mirrors, which are decorated with rocaille motifs. Exuberant decorations with gilded accents adorn the ceiling of the White Room.

The Speaker and the Deputy Speakers meet with foreign visitors in the **Brown Room**. The Neo-Rococo style dominates the room's décor and furniture. Painting *The Spring* by Latvian painter Vilhelms Purvītis adorns the room.

The **Green Room** is used for official meetings of the Presidium and, on special occasions, official meals for smaller delegations. The exquisite chandelier reflects Europe's interest in Eastern art.

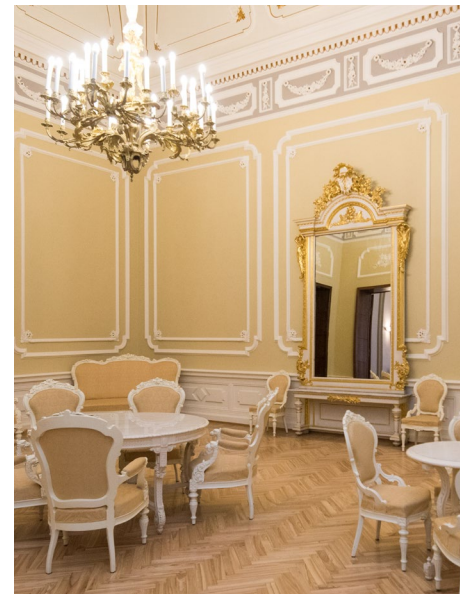
The **Fireplace Room** features one of the oldest fireplaces in the Saeima—hence the name. An original elegant wooden staircase leads to the Plenary Chamber. The furnishings are in Classicism style. This room houses the oldest art piece in the Saeima—an 18th century Chinese porcelain vase. Here, important guests arrive before their meeting. In addition, a portrait of Zigfrīds Anna Meierovics, first Minister of Foreign Affairs of Latvia, is hanging in this room. The portrait was a gift to the Saeima from its Speakers who had held the office after the restoration of Latvia's independence in honour of the 95th anniversary of Latvia's international recognition.

Other buildings of the Saeima

Four more buildings are located across the street from the main building of the Saeima on Torņa iela 3/5, Jēkaba iela 16, Jēkaba iela 10/12, and Jēkaba iela 6/8.

The building on **Torņa iela 3/5** houses offices of MPs and a chapel.

This building consists of two structures. The house on Torņa iela 3/5 replaced the former Jēkaba gate in the defensive wall surrounding Old Town Riga. It was built in 1704 as a typical residential house, whereas the building on Torņa iela 5 was constructed in 1685. Over the centuries, these buildings have been renovated many times. The latest reconstruction took place from 1999 to 2001. During the reconstruction, a number of unique wall paintings dating back to 18th and



■ Yellow Room

19th centuries were uncovered in several rooms, and a fragment of ancient Riga's defensive wall was uncovered in the basement.

The building on **Jēkaba iela 16** houses offices of parliamentary groups, committees, MPs and staff members of the Saeima, as well as the Visitor and Information Centre.

The façade of the building reveals both the horizontal window lintels, characteristic of Classicism, and the Baroque portals. A mansard storey was reconstructed in the late 20th century.

The building on **Jēkaba iela 10/12** accommodates committee meeting rooms, as well as offices of MPs and staff members of the Saeima. It was originally built for the Livonian Knighthood. The building's façade facing Jēkaba iela is decorated with plaster ornaments of Neo-Baroque, Neo-Rococo and Neo-Classical styles.

The reconstruction of another Saeima building at **Jēkaba iela 6/8** was completed in the autumn of 2016. The building, initially constructed for banking purposes and later managed by the National Library for many years, has been modernised. Now it is used for conferences and various events, as well as parliamentary committee meetings.

Guided tours of the Saeima

Anyone can visit the main building of the Saeima in order to see in person the unique architecture and interior of the building, as well as to learn about its history. Tours can be booked via the Saeima Protocol Department by phone +371 67087380, +371 67087483 or by e-mail ekskursijas@saeima.lv.