CONSTITUTIONAL COURT
REPUBLIC OF LATVIA

WELCOME TO THE MUSEUM

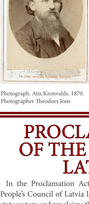
SATVERSME
FUNDAMENTAL LAW OF LATVIA

The Constitution of the Republic of Latvia is one of the oldest constitutions in force in Europe. The Constitution, adopted in 1922, continues to have supreme legal force in the modern Latvian legal system.

The historical path to the adoption of the Constitution, its application, as well as the full restoration of its functioning, attest to the continuity and development of Latvia as a democratic and law-governed state. In this sense, the Constitution is a symbol of Latvia's statehood and embodies the values of the Latvian people.

Since 1996, the Constitutional Court has been functioning to ensure constitutional fairness and to hear cases on the compatibility of laws with the Constitution, as well as other cases referred to its competence by law.

The term "Satversme" was created by Atis Kronvalds in 1869, explaining it as follows: "people have made laws people invented laws in order to find a shelter in case of need". Thus, in Latvia the term "Satversme" refers to the constitution or the fundamental law.

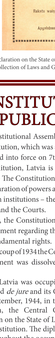


Photograph. Atis Kronvalds. 1870.
Photographer: Theodors Jons

Semantically, the concept of Satversme reflects the constitutional as tide a of limiting ("enclosing", "grasping") the power of the state by means of a constitution.

PROCLAMATION OF THE STATE OF LATVIA

In the Proclamation Act of November 18th, 1918, the People's Council of Latvia lays down the foundations of the state system and proclaims that the constitution will be drafted by a constituent assembly elected by the people. On May 27th, 1920, the Constituent Assembly legally consolidated the work of the Latvian People's Council in establishing the state by adopting the Declaration on the State of Latvia, the text of which later became the first and second articles of the Constitution.



"Declaration on the State of Latvia" by Constituent Assembly
From: Collection of Laws and Government Orders, No. 4 (31.08.1920)

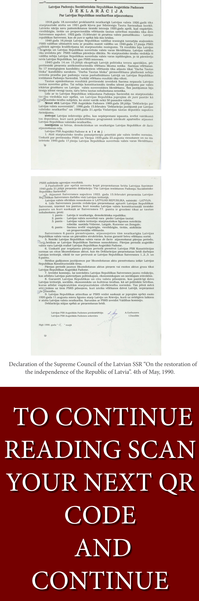
CONSTITUTION OF THE REPUBLIC OF LATVIA

The Constitutional Assembly took a year and a half to draft the Constitution, which was adopted on 15th of February 1922 and entered into force on 7th of November. According to the new Constitution, Latvia is a democratic republic under the rule of law. The Constitution also provides the main principles for the separation of powers and delimits the attributions vested to the main institutions – the Parliament, the Government, the President and the Courts.

However, the Constitutional Assembly was unable to come to an agreement regarding the rights and duties of the citizens, e.g. the fundamental rights.

After the coup of 1934 the Constitution was de facto suspended, the Parliament was dissolved, all the political parties were banned.

In 1940 Latvia was occupied by the USSR, but the Latvian state existed *de jure* and its Constitution was still in force. On 8th of September, 1944, in the conditions of Nazi Germany's occupation, the Central Council of Latvia adopted the Declaration on the State of Latvia, proclaiming the restoration of the Constitution. The diplomatic service abroad, which was active throughout the occupation, played an important role in maintaining the idea of the continuity of the Latvian state.

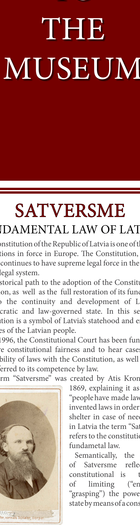


The initial text of the Constitution of the Republic of Latvia.

RESTORATION OF THE LATVIAN STATE

The Declaration of the Supreme Council of the Latvian SSR "On the Restoration of Independence of the Republic of Latvia" of the 4th of May, 1990, restored the functioning of the Constitution, while providing for a transitional period during which those articles of the Constitution which determine the constitutional and legal basis of the Latvian State shall remain in force.

The Constitution of Latvia was fully restored on 6th July 1993, on the day of the first sitting of the restored Parliament (Saeima).



Declaration of the Supreme Council of the Latvian SSR "On the restoration of the independence of the Republic of Latvia". 4th of May, 1990.

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