

OPAL Country Reports

The Latvian Parliament and EU Affairs

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OPAL Country Report on the Latvian Parliament¹

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I. General Position of Parliament in the Constitutional Balance of the Member State: Constitutional and institutional factors	
This section looks at the role of Parliament in the political system, to help us understand the relative power position of the legislature.	
1.1	What is the type of government in the political system of your member state? (i.e. parliamentary or semi-presidential)
	Parliamentary.
1.2	Is it a uni- or bicameral Parliament? If bicameral, is one house dominant or are both equally strong? Please briefly explain.
	Unicameral parliament.
1.3	Is the state federal, decentralized or unitary? If applicable, is it a form of asymmetrical federalism?
	Unitary state.
1.4	Briefly describe the electoral system, if applicable, for each chamber.
	Flexible party list proportional representation with 5% national threshold.
1.5	What (f)actors can prevent the parliament agreeing on EU legislation and/or treaty reform? (e.g. a constitutional court, or public referenda on questions of EU integration)
	A referendum, the Constitutional Court.

2. General Position of Parliament in the Constitutional Balance of the Member State: Political Factors	
This section is about the basic political factors which might influence parliament's strength in relation to the government.	
2.1	What is the type of government after the most recent elections e.g. single party, minority, coalition, oversized coalition government?

¹ This country report provides some basic data that has been collected in the context of the research for a chapter to be published in C. Heffler, C. Neuhold, O. Rozenberg, J. Smith & W. Wessels (Eds.). (forthcoming in 2014). *The Palgrave Handbook of National Parliaments and the European Union*. London: Palgrave, Macmillan.

	Coalition government.		
2.2	When were the most recent general elections and what were the results? Could you please give a short list of the parliamentary groups, their no. of seats in parliament and ideological position?		
	Latest election:	September 2011	
	Name of the party	No. and percentage of seats in parliament	Ideological position (e.g. Communist, left liberal, socialist, liberal, right liberal, conservative, Christian democrat, extreme right, ethnic minority or regionalist party)
	Harmony Centre	31/31%	Ethnic minority
	Zatlers Reform Party	22/22%	Right liberal
	Unity	20/20%	
	National Alliance	14/14%	National conservative
	Union of Greens and Farmers	13/13%	Agrarian
2.3	How polarized was parliamentary debate over ratification of the Lisbon Treaty? Which parliamentary party groups supported and which opposed ratification?		
	The Lisbon Treaty was ratified without major political debates in the society and the parliament. Seventy deputies voted in favour, three voted against ratification, while one abstained.		

3. New Provisions of the Lisbon Treaty on Direct Contact with EU Institutions

The Lisbon Treaty provides national parliaments with new opportunities for direct contact with the EU institutions. This section addresses the incorporation of the new Lisbon provisions into national law and concrete procedures. Questions 3.3 to 3.5 investigate in how far these procedures have been used.

3-1	<p>Have there been any regulations adopted by your member state to incorporate the new powers that are entrusted to the national parliaments by the Treaty of Lisbon? If so, please list the regulations in their appropriate categories:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Constitutional provisions b. Legal provisions - Statutory provisions c. Parliamentary Standing Orders d. Other (please specify) <p>Is this process complete or ongoing?</p>
	The new powers have not found reflection in any legislative act.
3-2	What exactly are the rules (i.e. parliamentary bodies involved, procedure, regional parliament's involvement, cooperation in bicameral systems) for...

3.2 i	The "Political Dialogue" with the Commission
	EAC monitors the situation and is entrusted with taking appropriate action (if deemed necessary by EAC members).
3.2 ii	The Early Warning Mechanism (EWM)
	EAC monitors the situation and is entrusted with taking appropriate action (if deemed necessary by EAC members).
3.2 iii	The "Passarelle clause"
	EAC monitors the situation and is entrusted with taking appropriate action (if deemed necessary by EAC members).
3.2 iv	The action of annulment before ECJ on breach with the subsidiarity principle (What quota of MPs is needed to enforce the action of annulment?)
	EAC monitors the situation and is entrusted with taking appropriate action (if deemed necessary by EAC members).
3.2 v	Accession of new member states to the EU
	EAC monitors the situation and is entrusted with taking appropriate action (if deemed necessary by EAC members).
3-3	How actively does the parliament engage in the political dialogue and "early warning mechanism" with the Commission?
	Given the heavy workload of EAC staff, the activity has been low. Most attention is devoted to the scrutiny of national positions. Lack of sanctions against the breach of the proportionality principle is said to be another de-motivating factor for the EAC.
3-4	Has parliament ever threatened to bring a legislative act to the ECJ because of subsidiarity concerns?
	Latvia has only once used the subsidiarity concerns to defend its national interests in the Laval case against Sweden. Moreover, the relatively short period of time given to prove the ineffectiveness of proposed measures (eight weeks) puts severe limits of activism of EAC.
3-5	If applicable to your member state, how does parliament proceed on the ratification of: a. Treaty Establishing the European Stability Mechanism, signed 2 Feb 2012 b. Treaty on Stability, Coordination and Governance in the Economic and Monetary Union, signed 2 March 2012
	It is the responsibility of the Foreign Affairs Committee to decide whether a treaty deserves a special ratification procedure – in cases of delegating new powers to EU institutions. The Treaty on Stability, Coordination and Governance in the Economic and Monetary Union was ratified in two readings – the standard procedure for ratifying international documents in the Saeima.