

I

Since its proclamation, it has been important for the state of Latvia that a fully self-contained and independent Latvian Orthodox Church, which operates in compliance with Latvian legislation, exists in the independent Latvia.

This was achieved under the leadership of Archbishop Jānis Pommers shortly after the proclamation of the Republic of Latvia.

II

Since the restoration of Latvia's independence, the Latvian Orthodox Church has determinedly restored the historical status of the church, which is deemed an autocephalous church in canon law.

The autocephalous status means that the Latvian Orthodox Church is completely self-contained and independent from any other pastoral power and influence outside of Latvia.

Certain amendments are necessary to the Law on the Latvian Orthodox Church in order for this law to appropriately reflect this self-contained and independent (autocephalous) status of the Latvian Orthodox Church.

III

There is a certain risk that the leadership of the Russian Orthodox Church could unilaterally liquidate the full autonomy and independence of the Latvian Orthodox Church and to alter its *de facto* canonical status. This would affect the secular status of the Latvian Orthodox Church within the Republic of Latvia, the determination of which is an issue reserved exclusively for the legislation of Latvia and the statutes of the Church itself.

With respect to the freedom of religion of the Latvian orthodox community, the canonical rights of the orthodox church and taking into consideration national security interests, the state of Latvia must be able to ensure and protect such a status for the Latvian Orthodox Church as is established in the legislation of Latvia based on the dialogue between the state of Latvia and the Church.

IV

The proposed draft law means the state *expressis verbis* recognises the self-contained and independent (autocephalous) status of the Latvian Orthodox Church.

Thus, the law correctly reflects and corroborates the situation that the Latvian Orthodox Church is independent of any pastoral power or influence outside of Latvia. It does not affect or interfere with the teachings of the Church or its canonical rights.

It is in line with our legal traditions regarding the relationship between the state and the church (*see Cabinet of Ministers Regulation of 8 October 1926 On the Status of the Orthodox Church*) and the national interests of Latvia.

Considering the aforementioned, as per Article 65 of the Constitution of the Republic of Latvia, it is my honour to submit for your examination the draft law “Amendments to the Law on the Latvian Orthodox Church”.

I urge the Saeima to examine this draft law in an urgent procedure and to ensure that it comes into force as soon as possible.

Annexed:

1. Draft law “Amendments to the Law on the Latvian Orthodox Church” – 2 pages
2. Annotation to the draft law “Amendments to the Law on the Latvian Orthodox Church” – 7 pages

President of Latvia

Egils Levits