

Satversme centenary year inaugural address by the President of Latvia, Egils Levits, at the Saeima

Published: 15.02.2022.

[Egils Levits](#)



Honourable Madam Speaker,

Honourable Prime Minister,

Justices of the Constitutional Court,

Ladies and gentlemen,

I

Today, we proudly and gratefully celebrate the 100th anniversary of our constitution, Satversme.

Hundred years, a century, is a long time for a constitution. The average validity of constitutions around the world, as estimated by constitutional law scholars, ranges somewhere around 20 years.

Our first democratically elected parliament, Constitutional Assembly, managed to create a constitution, which has lasted a century and is still contemporary and forward-looking.

II

Ladies and gentlemen,

Although written a century ago, Satversme not only fits the needs of modern society, but will also do good service to future generations, of that I am absolutely certain.

Take for example climate change, conservation and greening – a topic widely debated around Europe and elsewhere in the world. It is important to know that our basic law, Satversme, already contains provisions concerning sustainability and responsibility to future generations, and personal rights to live in a healthy and clean environment.

After previous financial crisis all European Union member states introduced fiscal discipline requirements, which we already had in Satversme since its adoption in 1922.

The second part of Article 66, which was drafted by Arvedis Bergs, stipulates that budget allocations cannot be spent recklessly; any spending should clearly identify the funding sources to be justified.

III

Satversme is one of the oldest constitutions in Europe and the world still in force.

It can be considered unique because we restored Satversme to its full power after restoring national independence. There is no other country in the world that has restored constitution to full legal and social effect after five decades of occupation.

However, decision to renew Satversme soon after restoration of independence was far from unanimous.

Declaration *On the Restoration of Independence of the Republic of Latvia* of 4 May 1990 restored and also suspended parts of Satversme until new draft would be produced.

I strongly advocated for full restoration of Satversme back then. A new constitution would pose great risks and was not needed. As I indicated then, 'Satversme [...] is not tainted by any Soviet legal or political ideologies and [...] as a basic law, it fits the purpose of an independent and democratic state (in a modern, not socialist sense)'.

Although many were determined to draft a new constitution, I managed to convince the political and legal community that it is unnecessary. And, on 21 August 1991, parliament adopted the constitutional law *On the Statehood of the Republic of Latvia* paved the way for full restoration of Satversme.

As we know today, it was a good and wise move. I myself had the pleasure to sign the act that restored Satversme to full effect on 6 July 1993 on behalf of the Latvian people as their representative in the 5th Saeima.

IV

We must keep the purpose and meaning of Satversme always in our minds. As we celebrate its centenary, let us not forget that Latvian State and Satversme exist for and by this purpose and meaning.

Latvian State can figuratively be compared to an armour protecting the Latvian nation. It insulates us from unwanted external shocks, as much as it is possible in today's globalised world.

And we could also describe Latvia as a safe, bright and nice place where we can all come together to discuss common interests without foreign influence. Quality and foresight of these decisions, however, still depends on our skills, education, civic awareness or, in short, wisdom.

But it is the Latvian State that ensures we can decide our own fate.

Whereas Satversme, regulates what the state of Latvia should represent, its purpose and various aspects of everyday life.

According to Satversme, Latvia is a nation state founded to guarantee the existence of the Latvian nation, its language and culture throughout the centuries and all the next generations.

Satversme also provides that Latvian State must maintain democracy as its form of government. A parliamentary democracy at that. According to Arvedis Bergs, that is the most appropriate form of government for us, and also what we need.

Our constitution states that Latvia adheres to fundamental principles of socially-responsible state and rule of law in its social and legal interactions.

That was the purpose in mind of the authors of Satversme hundred years ago, and the same objective we had 30 years ago when we restored Satversme to its full force.

V

But, as time goes on, new issues beyond the existing case-law of Satversme begin to appear. Issues, which are to be resolved by the constitutional legislature.

Issues may arise in relation to institutional framework, but they can also be linked to values.

That is why new provisions were added with time to make Satversme more contemporary. Fundamental rights chapter is the most noteworthy addition, which was made in 1998. It contains a list of fundamental rights essential for Latvia as a modern country governed by rule of law. Another important addition was the 2014 Preamble, which establishes the fundamental elements of the Latvian State: the purpose and meaning of the state, its place in Europe, the overarching principles such as democracy, rule of law, socially-responsible and nation state, attributes of national and constitutional identity, the inviolable core of the constitution.

Constitutional Court has the special mission to act as the guardian of values and principles listed in the fundamental rights chapter and the Preamble and oversee their implementation.

VI

As regards to future, I believe it is time to start thinking about another addition to our basic law. We should consider new provisions regarding the fundamental rights in the digital domain. Progress towards a digital society requires us to produce the necessary constitutional law to support such evolution.

It is crucial not only for protection of human rights in the digital space, but also for counterbalancing the global shifts that are pushing democracies closer to the edge where personal autonomy, free will are at a particular risk, which emanates from increasing dominance and pervasion of digital technologies in our everyday life and those who control these technologies.

The idea of a National Council has also been around for a while. It would act as a top-level advisory body to Saeima and the government. Many countries have similar institutions. It is a certain that such council could help Latvian legislators improve their law-making. But the specifics are still up for debate.

VII

The purpose and meaning of the Latvian State, the DNA of Satversme, its sacred core are eternal and unamendable. Neither today nor the next 100 years of Satversme, or ever more.

I hope you will celebrate the centenary year of Satversme by revisiting various provisions of it to refresh your knowledge and remind yourself that you, too, can be more involved in how Latvia is run because Satversme gives us plenty of tools for becoming more skilful and better version of citizen of Latvia.

Thank you!

<https://www.president.lv/en/article/satversme-centenary-year-inaugural-address-president-latvia-egils-levits-saeima>