Dear ladies and gentlemen,

Dear colleagues,

My name is Ilze Zaščinska, and I am the Head of the Archives of the Saeima of the Republic of Latvia. I would like to start by thanking the organisers of this conference for the opportunity to address you.

First, I would like to give you some background information about our Archives. It was established on 6 July 1993, when the 5th convocation of the Saeima started its work. The Archives is a part of the Transcript Department of the Saeima Chancellery. Four staff members work in the Archives. In the Archives, we only store documents of the Saeima, including documents of committees, parliamentary groups, offices and the various departments of the Chancellery of the Saeima.

The stockroom of the Archives is housed in two rooms. There are also two workstations for serving visitors to our premises.

I would like to start my report with a brief overview of our history. On 21 August this year we celebrated the 20th anniversary since the Supreme Council of the Republic of Latvia adopted the Constitutional Law on the Statehood of the Republic of Latvia. This date was a turning point in history of our state, and we restored our de facto independence. Latvia was reunited with other free democracies.

In order to provide a better understanding of the situation, let me go even further into the past. I am talking about the period of time from the mid-1980’s up to today, the period during which Latvia was in the transition from the totalitarian regime to democracy, which of course, changed the role of the parliament. This period of time in Latvia can be divided into three stages.

**The first stage.** Until 3 May 1990, we were governed by the Supreme Council of the Latvian Soviet Socialist Republic and the USSR totalitarian regime, which was characterised by concentration of power in the hands of a single political party and suppression of freedom of speech and other liberties. However, public and political movements were born at that time to voice people’s aspirations for freedom and independence. One could regard the Supreme Council of the Latvian Soviet Socialist Republic as the formal legislative body.

**The second stage.** The Supreme Council of the Republic of Latvia functioned from 4 May 1990 to 5 July 1993. This was a period of great historic significance not only in Latvia but also in our neighbouring countries – Lithuania and Estonia – as well as other countries of Eastern Europe. On 4 May 1990, the Declaration on Restoration of Independence of the Republic of Latvia was adopted,
which provided for a transition period until the *de facto* restoration of the statehood of the Republic of Latvia. It was followed by the events of January 1991, when the USSR tried to reinstate its jurisdiction over Latvia by means of military force. Then there was the attempted coup d’état in Moscow, also known as the August Putsch, and, finally, on 21 August the Constitutional Law was adopted, rendering the transition period null and void and stating that Latvia is an independent and democratic republic and that until the Saeima is convened, the highest legislative power belongs to the Supreme Council of the Republic of Latvia. The adoption of the Constitutional Law rendered the USSR laws null and void in Latvia. It was the Law adopted on 21 August that served as the point of reference for other countries to recognise the restoration of Latvia’s independence. During this period the legislative work was especially active.

**The third stage.** The Saeima of the Republic of Latvia started its work on 6 July 1993 and continues to do so up to this day. On 6 July 1993 the 5th convocation of the Saeima (the first parliament after the regaining of independence) held its first sitting and completely reinstated the Satversme (Constitution of Latvia) adopted on 15 February 1922, with the incorporated values of Western democracies and the rule of law.

In each of these stages, parliament has had a different role from the viewpoint of the state and society. The differences are clearly illustrated by the sharp changes in the intensity of parliamentary work. The 11th convocation of the Supreme Council of the Latvian Soviet Socialist Republic convened only for 25 sittings and adopted 60 laws in four years, while the Supreme Council of the Republic of Latvia in three years held 331 sittings and adopted 400 laws. The intensity of work at the Supreme Council of the Republic of Latvia increased 13 times; the same can be said about the quantity of documents produced. This was a great challenge for the Chancellery of the Supreme Council.

What were the main problems faced by the Chancellery of the Supreme Council and later by the Chancellery of the Saeima, including the staff members of the Archives, after Latvia regained independence?

**First,** lack of democratic laws that govern record keeping and archiving procedures, as well as prescribe rules of accessibility of various documents. At that time politicians were focused mainly on shaping of our renewed state rather than preserving historic evidence; these issues were addressed gradually throughout a period that exceeds 10 years.
Second, the lack of trust among politicians represented in the parliament resulted in a situation where many of the Supreme Council’s documents ended up in the personal archives of certain MPs. Taking into account these circumstances, the 5th convocation of the Saeima supplemented the Rules of Procedure with a provision according to which parliamentary groups and committees of the Saeima must transfer documents to the Archives of the Saeima upon the expiry of their term of office. This provision ensured that after the term of office of the 5th convocation of the Saeima, all the documents, with a few exceptions, were transferred to the Archives.

Third, the rapid increase in the workload associated with the large quantity of draft laws considered by the Supreme Council revealed the lack of qualified personnel. The Archives had only one staff member. A document classification system was nonexistent; therefore, the quality of record keeping within various departments depended solely on the responsible employees’ knowledge of this area. It was only when the 5th convocation of the Saeima started its work that a document classification system was developed. For a long time, it was the only document that governed the record keeping procedures in the various departments of the Saeima.

In the following part of my report, I will provide you with details regarding changes in laws regarding the accessibility of documents.

In the territory of the Latvian Soviet Socialist Republic, accessibility of archival records was governed by the Regulations on the Use of Documents and Materials in the Reading Rooms of the USSR State Archives adopted in 1964. According to these regulations, only researchers appointed from specific institutions or organisations were permitted to access documents in the reading rooms of the Archives. The Basic Regulations of USSR State Archives Operations adopted in 1983 expanded the range of people entitled to access such documents; they included university students with appropriate appointment from their establishments of higher education, and, in exceptional cases, also certain individuals. As to the rest of the population, access to data in the Archives was limited to requesting information regarding social and judicial matters. Therefore, the accessibility of archival records was still quite limited to a narrow circle of privileged people.

The Law on Press and Other Mass Media, adopted on 20 December 1990, was the first law that governed accessibility of documents after regaining of independence. According to this law, the mass media are entitled to freely access information from institutions and public organisations.
The Archives Law was adopted on 26 March 1991. At that time, the main task was to provide a uniform system for preserving documents and materials, as well as to prevent the leaking of such documents and materials outside the territory of Latvia; therefore, accessibility was not a top priority.

According to the Law, archival records, subject to certain procedures, were made accessible to the following persons:

- **citizens of Latvia** (here the term *citizens* includes all persons residing in the territory of Latvia, including non-citizens);
- **citizens of other states**.

Since there was no procedure for granting access to documents, the heads of institutions were free to establish such procedures internally. A procedure for granting access to documents was also nonexistent at the Supreme Council.

The Constitutional Law *On the Rights and Obligations of Individuals and Citizens* was adopted on 10 December 1991. It acknowledged an individual’s right to freely access and distribute information. Later these provisions were incorporated in the Satversme (the Constitution of Latvia).

At that time, the status of restricted access was not assigned to information on the following:

- state secret;
- personal data of natural entities;
- commercial secret;
- information for an institution’s internal use.

USSR regulations were still applied to govern accessibility of these kinds of information.

The **Law on Official Secrets** was adopted on 17 October 1996.

On 29 October 1998, the **Freedom of Information Law** was adopted. This Law sets forth the procedure for determining restricted access to information, such as commercial secrets, information for an institution’s internal use, as well as the procedure for using such information.

On 23 March 2000, the **Personal Data Protection Law** was adopted.

Unfortunately, none of the above-mentioned laws set forth a procedure regarding submission of declassified documents to the Archives (it is still a significant problem for the Archives of the Saeima); thus, a significant part of information remained inaccessible.

Adoption of the **Archives Law** on 11 February 2010, finally resolved problems that had existed for 20 years with regard to accessibility of documents, including problems related to the transfer of declassified
documents to the Archives, the period of restricted accessibility to personal data, restricted accessibility to documents that are in poor physical condition, etc. However, binding regulations of this Law have not yet been devised.

What was the situation regarding the accessibility to information in the Archives of the Saeima?

In the period from 1993 to 2000, no special procedure was set regarding the use of archival records. Therefore, the Archives observed the following regulatory documents:

- the **Archives Law**, which was adopted in 1991;
- Instructions on **Accumulation, Accounting, Preservation and Use of Archival Records of Legal Entities**, which were devised in 1995 by the Directorate General of the National Archives of Latvia. These instructions set forth the procedure for accounting, registering and using files in the archives of public institutions. Use (as in the Soviet era) was defined only as providing to persons statements on social and judicial matters. With the adoption of the new Archives Law, these instructions became null and void;
- the **Freedom of Information Law**, adopted in 1998, required persons requesting information to indicate only their name and surname and to formulate their request as precisely as possible.

In 2000, the **Regulations on the Archives of the Saeima** were adopted specifying the rights and obligations of the Archives of the Saeima, as well as the procedure for submitting requests to the Archives.

In 2006, the **Instructions for the Archives of the Saeima** were adopted.

In 2011, the **Procedure for Making and Storing Audio Records of the Meetings of the Committees of the Saeima** was adopted.

Pursuant to these documents:

- each individual who has submitted a request indicating his or her name, surname and specific reason for the request has access to the stock of the Archives of the Saeima;
- the request should be addressed to the Director of the Chancellery of the Saeima;
- a decision on providing audio recordings of closed meetings of a Saeima committee is made by the chairman of the relevant committee.

Pursuant to the Rules of Procedure of the Saeima, if the Archives refuses to provide information, the refusal can be appealed to the Presidium.
of the Saeima; however, if the Presidium denies access to the information, the decision can be appealed to the administrative court.

Analysis of the requests submitted in the period between 1994 and 2010 shows that until 2000 requests followed the Soviet traditions, namely, natural entities requested information upon recommendation of an educational institution or employer despite the fact that the Freedom of Information Law came into force in 1998.

During these years, public interest in the work of the parliament increased significantly.

Regarding intellectual accessibility

The main goal of the Soviet reference system was to simplify the work of the archivist in the search for information. During the term of office of the Supreme Council of Latvian Soviet Socialist Republic, only general descriptions were available because the number of documents was small.

After restoration of democracy, the main goal of the reference system was to satisfy a client’s needs. Thus, it was necessary to establish diverse reference systems. During the term of office of the Supreme Council of the Republic of Latvia, the main source of information was still a description; however, other sources of information were also being created – for example, alphabetic and thematic lists of contents of draft laws and draft resolutions reviewed in plenary sittings, as well as card indices reflecting the activity of each MP in plenary sittings.

From 1993 to 1998, the reference system consisted of the following elements: descriptions of files, alphabetic and thematic lists of contents of draft laws and draft resolutions reviewed in plenary sittings, as well as card indices. In 1998, the Documents Department of the Chancellery of the Saeima started creating an electronic registry of draft laws and draft resolutions. Currently, registries of documents filed after 1993, namely during the 5th convocation of the Saeima, are available on the website of the Saeima. The registry of the draft laws contains a chronological list of information on the processing of each draft law. Since 1998, the registry offers an opportunity to get acquainted with documents reviewed in plenary sittings.

In 2001, the electronic database began to be introduced. In 2006, the electronic record keeping system was launched in the Saeima. This system provides access to electronic registries of correspondence among the organisational units of the Saeima, and thus it significantly simplifies the work of the Archives.
Now I would like to tell you about the electronic database of the Archives of the Saeima. Creation of this database was coordinated with the National Archives of Latvia in order to ensure compliance with the uniform information system of archives. This database contains metadata set forth in the descriptions, as well as metadata such as the date of a document’s publication, related files, location of the document on the Internet, list of file’s contents etc. First, the database of documents of the Supreme Council filed with the Archives of the Saeima was established because public interest in these documents was high, but there was a lack of reference materials. The database was published on the website of the Saeima. This database, together with all relevant documents, is submitted to the National Archives of Latvia. So far, we have created the database of documents of the 5th, 6th, 7th and 8th convocations of Saeima that covers a period from 1993 to 2006, and the database of documents of the 9th convocation of the Saeima is being created.

Analysis of the documents requested from the Archives of the Saeima reveals that until 2002 individuals had requested mainly transcripts of plenary sittings and draft laws; the documents of parliamentary inquiry committees were also in great demand. However, after 2002 mainly the documents of standing committees were requested. This trend is related to the fact that these documents are not available on the website of the Saeima.

With regard to the accessibility of documents on the website of the Saeima, it can be said that in 1998, electronic copies of transcripts of plenary sittings of the Supreme Council and the 5th convocation of the Saeima were beginning to be made. All transcripts, starting with transcripts of plenary sittings of the Supreme Council, are available on the website of the Saeima. Since 2002, the website also contains the results of voting in plenary sittings. The website of the Saeima also offers an opportunity to get acquainted with the above-mentioned documents reviewed in plenary sittings, draft resolutions of the Saeima, as well as questions and interpellations made by MPs.

Since the website of the Saeima contains approximately 30% of our archival records, it significantly relieves the work of the Archives.

The Archives section of the website is available in the Latvian language, and it is viewed by approximately 30,000 individuals per month; approximately 4,000 persons use the website to get acquainted with draft laws, and 2,000 persons use it to read the transcripts of plenary sittings.
These numbers are quite large because there are approximately only 2 million inhabitants in Latvia.

As of this year, the website of the Saeima also contains information on the Archives of the Saeima and documents available in the Archives.

In conclusion, I would like to indicate that currently the Archives of the Saeima contain 24,587 hard copies of files, as well as 116 audio and video recordings. Once a year, the audio and video recordings are submitted to the National Archives of Latvia. Photographic documents are not submitted to the Archives of the Saeima; they are collected by the Photo Studio of the Technical Services Department of the Chancellery of the Saeima, which, in turn, submits these documents to the National Archives of Latvia.

Currently, the documents of the 10th convocation of the Saeima are being transferred to the Archives, and the number of processed documents is increasing daily.

During these 20 years, a lot has been done in order for the Archives of the Saeima to comply with globally recognised democratic principles. A lot has still to be done in improving the reference system, converting paper documents into electronic format and promoting the Archives.

Thank you!