

The First Report of the Republic of Latvia to the General Conference of UNESCO on Measures Taken to Implement the Recommendation concerning the Promotion and Use of Multilingualism and Universal Access to Cyberspace

Introduction

The first report of the Republic of Latvia regarding the UNESCO recommendation on the promotion and use of multilingualism and universal access to cyberspace has been drawn up in reply to the letter CL/3798 dated 30th June 2006 of Mr. Kouchiro Matsuura, Director-General of UNESCO, urging by late January 2007 to submit to the UNESCO Secretariat a Report on the implementation of the recommendation of the 33rd session of UNESCO's General Conference (33 C/Resolution 54).

Development of multilingual content and systems

The official language in the Republic of Latvia is Latvian, which has been enforced by "**Official Language Law**"¹ (the law was adopted by the Saeima on 9th December 1999) of the Republic of Latvia.

The purpose of the law is to ensure the maintenance, protection and development of the Latvian language, the maintenance of the cultural and historic heritage of the Latvian nation, the right to freely use the Latvian language in any sphere of life within the whole territory of Latvia, the integration of members of ethnic minorities into the society of Latvia, while observing their rights to use their native language or other languages, increased influence of the Latvian language in the cultural environment of Latvia and to promote a more rapid integration of society.

The Law prescribes the use and protection of the official language in State and local government institutions, courts and institutions constituting the judicial system, as well as in other institutions, organisations and undertakings (companies), the educational sphere and other spheres.

In the Republic of Latvia large attention is focused on preservation of the Latvian language. A National programme "**Integration of Society in Latvia**"² (approved by the Cabinet of Ministers in 2001) has been drawn up with the main purpose of developing a stable society that had one common national language – the Latvian language – and where the opportunity to use this language was

¹ www.isec.gov.lv/normdok/vvallik.htm

² [www.integracija.gov.lv/doc_upl/VP_SIL\(2\).doc](http://www.integracija.gov.lv/doc_upl/VP_SIL(2).doc)

ensured throughout the whole country, as well as support provided to the ethnic minorities in maintaining their languages and use these in accordance with the laws of the Republic of Latvia.

As determined by the Cabinet of Ministers Instruction No. 7 of 04.12.2001 **“Order in which state institutions shall place information on the Internet”**³, state institutions shall publish information on their Home Pages in one foreign language (Russian or English), and, should this allow for higher public awareness of the relevant state institution and its focus areas, or more efficient provision of services, to do so also in other foreign languages.

According to the **Law on State Information Systems**⁴ (adopted by the Saeima on 2nd May 2002), the holder of the state information systems shall ensure, and be responsible for, use of the state information systems in the national language, providing also for use of any other language as appropriate to the relevant international obligations.

In 2005, the study **“On Home Pages of public administration and local government institutions of the Republic of Latvia and other EU Member States”**⁵ was conducted in Latvia, where it was stated that the information published on Home Pages of all ministries of the Republic of Latvia had also been made available in a foreign language. In 12 ministries, or 71%, the Home Page information is provided in one foreign language – English; in 5 ministries, or 29%, information is available in two foreign languages – English and Russian.

Command of languages plays an important role in promoting IT usage in the country. In 2006, the study **“The problems faced by small and medium enterprises and residential groups in receiving and using public administration and e-commerce services”** was conducted in Latvia, in which 85% of the respondents have claimed Latvian as their native language; average or satisfactory command of the language was demonstrated by 6% of the respondents only. The situation as to the command of English is by far less favourable – less than 10% of the respondents have claimed to have good command of English, whereas 57% have rated their knowledge of the English language as unsatisfactory.

Though the importance of the English language has slightly been diminished by the common EU practices where German and French play an equally important role, English still remains the most widely used language on the Internet, which is why, in addition to the above hindrances, one would also say that at least half of the respondents of said study will fail to use Internet efficiently and at best advantage due to insufficient knowledge of the English language.

The situation is very likely to change for the better in the future, as the records show very clear and distinct differences per age group – in the age group above 45, only less than 30% of the respondents have claimed their knowledge

³ www.eps.gov.lv/files/juridiskabaze/ievieto_info_interneta.doc

⁴ www.likumi.lv/doc.php?id=62324

⁵ www.eps.gov.lv/files/petijumi/analiize_iedziivotaaji_1804.doc

of the English language to be average or good, whereas among young people the same represents more than 70%. It is quite obvious that insufficient knowledge of the language will not be an obstacle to the younger generation, hindering them from using the Internet.

In September 2005, the study “**On the availability of Internet sites of cultural establishments in the context of multilingualism**”⁶ was conducted in Latvia.

Cultural establishments have been classified in four groups: libraries, archives, museums, and other establishments.

The portal www.muzeji.lv⁷ provides brief information of 134 museums and branch-museums in three languages - Latvian, English, Russian.

19 museums, or 15%, of the total number of museums in Latvia, have developed their own websites; as stated in the above study, the majority, or 68%, of the museum websites are multilingual; 3 websites provide information in three languages – Latvian, English and Russian (16% of the museum website total); 10 websites are bilingual, providing information in Latvian and English (16% of the museum website total); 6, or 32%, museum websites are monolingual; 5, or 26%, are available only in Latvian, and 1, or 6%, is available only in English (6%).

The portal www.arhivi.lv⁸ provides information of the archiving system in three languages - Latvian, English, Russian.

Library websites have been classified in two groups – Academic libraries and Public libraries - and are reviewed separately as their user profiles differ from those used in other portals.

Academic library websites and websites of libraries of educational establishments (total of 30 websites). As stated in the above study, half of the existing library websites are monolingual, and the other half - multilingual. 14, or 47%, of these websites are monolingual, of which 12, or 40%, are available in Latvian, and 2, or 7%, are in English. 15, or 50%, of the existing websites can be classified as bilingual sites, of which 12, or 40%, provide information in Latvian and English, and 3, or 10%, are available in Latvian and Russian. Only 1 website, or 3%, provides information in three languages - Latvian, English and Russian.

Public library websites (total of 18 websites). The majority of Public library websites are monolingual, representing 15, or 83%, of the total number of such websites; 3, or 17%, of Public library websites can be classified as bilingual sites; 12, or 40%, provide information in Latvian and English.

There also exist a few other establishments that provide culture content on their websites, such as the Artificial Intelligence Laboratory⁹, The Latvian

⁶ www.mek.oszk.hu/minerva/survey/

⁷ www.muzeji.lv

⁸ www.arhivi.lv

⁹ www.aillab.lv/

Institute¹⁰, and the Archives of Latvian Folklore¹¹. Information on these portals is available in two languages - Latvian and English.

State Culture Policy Guidelines for 2006-2015 of the Republic of Latvia lays down the following obligation with regard to the availability and development of the Information Society:

“Based on the study results, the Ministry of Culture, jointly with the National Board of Culture, State Culture Capital Foundation (SCCF), local governments, Centre for Non-governmental Organisations (NGO Centre) and private sector, by using latest information and communications technologies (ICT) and involving mass media, shall promote public interest and non-stop discussion regarding culture values, including also:

- to develop and manage an all-inclusive and multilingual culture portal in Latvia www.kultura.lv

- to provide for a qualitative and versatile audiovisual environment, thereby facilitating free exchange of ideas and know-how and strengthening of the common human and national values in the society,

- the Ministry of Culture will define the national policy compliant with the EU audio-visual policy guidelines,

- to support promotion of qualitative content and multilingualism in the electronic mass media in the EU Member States.”

Various solutions have been developed in Latvia in order to facilitate overcoming the language barrier and ensure higher availability of the content to the whole society, including also solutions that allow the Internet user to translate the relevant content from a foreign language into Latvian and vice versa.

The latest version of the Latvian-made software provides for a whole variety of functions, allowing to use the PC either in Latvian or in a foreign language. For instance, the software “**Tildes Birojs 2005**”¹² supports use of the Latvian language for work with PCs, including also spelling facility. It provides access to the most recent EU, business and other terms.

The Internet inquiries and translation system “**Letonika**”¹³ comprises both the existing and newly-established digital resources that are available in the Latvian language and provide information about Latvia. Letonika provides access to various dictionaries (including also English-Latvian-English, Russian-Latvian-Russian, German-Latvian-German and Latvian-Lithuanian).

As of 2nd February 2006, the Latvian National Library is a full-fledged member of The European Library project. The work of the Latvian National Library under this project is aimed at facilitating access to the resources of European national libraries.

¹⁰ www.li.lv/

¹¹ www.lfk.lv

¹² www.tilde.lv

¹³ www.letonika.lv

Facilitating Access to Networks and services

Internet access is described best by various studies conducted in Latvia during the past few years. The study **“The problems faced by small and medium enterprises and residential groups in receiving and using public administration and e-commerce services”** (2006) states that 36% of the total population in Latvia use Internet on a regular basis. The economically active part of the population, aged 25 - 55, has recorded the highest degree of awareness of e-services, whereas the group of respondents with lowest-pay know significantly less about the various electronic services made available to the public. The Internet usage in Riga, the capital city of Latvia, and other major towns and cities of the country is twice higher than in regional cities and towns and rural areas. Search for information, education, e-mail and chatting have been listed as the main reason for using the Internet; in 31% cases the main purpose has been to access banking services. Nearly one sixth of the respondents (14%) use Internet for shopping purposes – to sell or buy goods.

Based on the **“Evaluation study on the availability and efficiency of electronic services in Latvia”** of 2005, 82.9% of the respondents use public or local government services, representing a good potential also for electronic services. However, in majority of cases (61.6% cases), the inhabitants still choose to obtain information about the services by visiting the establishment in person. Internet as the source of information has been listed most by students (56.1%) and businessmen (63.6%), representing significantly lower numbers among the unemployed and retired people – 18.8% and 2.7% respectively.

The Internet installation costs stand for the main reason for the low density of Internet services in rural areas. In cities and towns with higher population number these costs are lower, but the number of potential Internet users is higher. Whereas, in rural areas the situation is quite the reverse: the installation costs keep growing, but the solvency of potential customers is dropping. Higher use of Internet services in households can be achieved through state and private partnership, thereby reducing the public sector finance contribution to a minimum.

Electronic service (e-service) costs in Latvia vary by local government, though they all provide for pay and free of charge public e-services. 54% of Internet access points located throughout the country allow for free access facility. In all regions the highest pay is for international access.

Various measures and activities have been undertaken in Latvia aimed to facilitate access to the Internet.

Activity 1.3.1. **“Development of public information and electronic government systems”** of the National programme **“Development and upgrade of the electronic government infrastructure basis”**, of the EU funds planning document – Latvia’s National Development Plan (Single Programming

Document 2004 – 2006), aims to facilitate the upgrade of the existing and development of new state information systems, integrating these into a single state system; to ensure public access and availability of public services, and to promote introduction of e-government and optimisation of state and local government administration. During the period from 2004 – 2006, 19 projects have been launched at a total cost of 12.6 million lats (Euro 18 million) to meet the said objective. These projects have facilitated the development and upgrade of 11 state information systems allowing for public access; introduction of 58 electronic services provided by state and local government institutions; installation of 670 Internet connections in various public establishments; training of staff of 2 447 public bodies and procurement of 4 582 PC hardware items meeting the needs of various public bodies.

The EU Structural Funds co-financed project **“Development of public Internet access points”** plays a major role in the development of the country. Public Internet access points have been made available throughout the country – public access has been provided in nearly all local governments and public libraries located in the territory of these local governments, and the number of such points keeps growing. As scheduled, 300 more public Internet access points are about to be installed by 2008; by 2013 this number is likely to be increased by another 400 access points.

Various e-health projects are ongoing currently in Latvia, including also those facilitating the introduction of electronic health records and health data base system, e-prescribing and development of the national e-health portal.

The Ministry of Welfare of the Republic of Latvia ¹⁴ has also facilitated active work in other areas so that to promote the use of information systems in social and rehabilitation services, as well as the development and upgrade of technical assistance system, sick leave registers and social care registers.

The National programme **“Broadband network development strategy for 2006 - 2012”** is ensured through attracting the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) financing. The programme aims to ensure availability of broadband Internet services to the whole population of the country, regardless of the location of residents, including also rural and remote access areas.

Access to broadband services plays a major role in facilitating use of IS at best advantage (including also access to e-government, e-health, e-business, e-learning services).

Development of broadband access in Latvia is one of the main pre-requisites for:

- Ensuring the development of the country’s economy and culture and its competitiveness in international markets, facilitating efficient and profound use of the benefits of modern information and communication technologies (ICT),
- Readjustment of commercial and private operations so that to take maximum advantage of the ICT benefits,

¹⁴ www.lm.gov.lv/?setl=2

- Increased efficiency of operations by state administration institutions, development of e-society, and to ensure the relevant prerequisites allowing for implementation of the e-government programmes and projects,
- Equality of all members of the society, regardless of their social status or geographical location, providing also for new employment opportunities.

The objective of the broadband network development policy is by 2012 to ensure broadband access to the target audience such as natural persons, state administration institutions, businessmen, schools, hospitals at an agreeable price and covering 80% - 95% of the country's territory. Access to broadband services will include such activities as upgrade of the existing electronic communications services infrastructure, development of new infrastructure items and maintenance of the same.

Access to broadband services in high population density areas (cities, towns and regional centres) is provided by electronic communications merchants with high success. Development of access services in economically underdeveloped areas with low population density is either very slow or at halt, which is why state funding needs to be attracted to promote broadband development in these areas.

State funding is ensured as appropriate to the electronic communications policy guidelines – efficient competitiveness and availability of Information Society services to the whole of the society.

The State Unified Library Information Network (SULIN) or the „**Network of Light**”¹⁵ is an integral part of the “**Latvian National Library**” project. The project aims to interlink the newly-refurbished building of the Latvian National Library with more than a thousand regional libraries, thereby allowing the personnel and visitors of these libraries to access library resources, using the Internet.

Commencing 2003, the state agency “**Culture Information Systems**”¹⁶ has been engaged in the implementation of the project “National Unified Library Information System” that is aimed to allow for provision of the universal information service in all libraries of Latvia. The main purpose of the project is to facilitate the development of the relevant technical infrastructure in the libraries, including also installation of high-quality Internet connections that will allow the public to access the Internet at no charge to themselves. To allow for management and maintenance of the information technologies (including also Internet) the state agency Culture Information Systems have concluded special agreements with the relevant local governments.

Under the project “Development of the National Portal” of the ERDF National draft programme „Development and improvement of the infrastructural foundation for electronic governance” activity “E-Government Portfolio” a

¹⁵ www.gaismaspils.lv

¹⁶ www.kis.gov.lv

national portal www.latvija.lv was launched in Latvia in 2006. The portal is targeted at both the local and international user and aims to provide centralised access to the Internet sites of various state administration and local government institutions of Latvia, as well as the electronic services made available for public use. The Internet resources and information made available on the portal have been systematised and classified by area, which gives the portal an added value.

There also exist various large-scale projects, which aim to facilitate efficient and inclusive e-government policy and services. These projects are carried out within the framework of the National Programme for 2007 – 2013, attracting also the ERDF funding.

Currently, a total of about 900 various state administration and local government services have been made available to the public. In 2005, these services were used by about 80% of the population. In 2005, only 12% of the population have visited the Home Pages of state administration institutions, and 3% of companies have used electronic services for business needs¹⁷. In 2007, 50,000 civil servants will be allocated the **e-Signature**.

On 19 April 2006, an activity **“Development and launch of state and local government electronic services”** has been launched within the framework of the ERDF National draft programme **“E-Government Portfolio”**, and work commenced on **“Drawing up the standard procedures document regarding customer service centre operations”**. The main objective of the project is:

- To provide for organisational, regulatory and technical framework, allowing for state and local government electronic services and introduction of modern customer service methodology (customer service centres),
- To conduct 25 state and local government electronic service pilot projects with the purpose of:
 - ensuring higher availability of the relevant services and more comfort to customers in using these,
 - to check the viability of the proposed electronic service framework guidelines in practice, and obtain the relevant know-how allowing for further development of electronic services.

Work on **“Support to setting up a coordination unit responsible for provision of services”** has been scheduled under the activity **“Development and launch of state and local government electronic services”** of the draft programme **“E-Government Portfolio”** aimed to search for and pinpoint the most optimum service development solution appropriate to the relevant obligations and liabilities.

In March 2006, new state information system **“State Information Systems Register”**¹⁸ was introduced with the purpose of keeping records of state information systems. The State Information Systems Register has been made publicly available on the Internet¹⁹, allowing for single point of access to

¹⁷ Report „On progress of implementing the Electronic government development programme for 2005 – 2009”

¹⁸ www.visr.eps.gov.lv/visr/?action=2&type=7

¹⁹ www.visr.eps.gov.lv

information concerning state information systems. Visitors to this site can either search for information in alphabetical order, or by holder or other search criteria, thereby obtaining the relevant state information systems data. Access to the Register is at no charge to the customer.

The **State Information Systems Register data quality monitoring procedures** have been defined and applied regularly in order to check on the quality of the personal data incorporated in the Population Register²⁰ and conformity of this data with the original information. The number of online information system users is being increased subject to technical and administrative viability, giving priority to the information system users, who not only search for information, but also update the existing data. As at 1st January 2005, online update of the Population Register data was facilitated by 189 local governments, whereas as at 1st January 2006 the same represented 325. The total of 18,874 users, representing 1,291 establishments and institutions, have been registered to have used online the Population Register and Electoral Register information systems and the applications maintained by the Citizenship and Office of Migration Affairs. The said information systems and data incorporated therein are being used by all major national-importance registers and information systems, including also the Enterprise Register²¹, State Revenue Service²², Vehicle Register, etc.

High-capacity online interfaces are used to facilitate access to these registers and IS; these interfaces allow for processing of high residential information volumes by an unlimited number of users. In addition to this, 162 agreements with various notaries, bailiffs, lawyers, banks and other merchants have been concluded to allow for online access to the Population Register data.

The Latvian Environment, Geology and Meteorology Agency (hereinafter – LEGMA) **provides for online access to 15 various environment and geology registers and data basis** (the LEGMA Home Page²³ is used as single point of access in this regard). Issues regarding the validity of the information incorporated in the registers and data basis will be focused on during the course of implementing the e-signature project.

Contributing to the quality of data, special **data quality modules have been defined by the State Unified Computerised Land Register²⁴**, which allow for verification and analysis of data; in addition to this, connections have also been provided to other state information systems, such as the Address Register, Population Register, etc.

Exchange of data among the various state information systems has been conducted in online mode, using special interfaces.

The State Address Register has been made subject to regular data quality procedures, which are conducted appropriate to the annual time schedules. The

²⁰ www.pmlp.gov.lv/?_p=477&menu__id=11

²¹ www.ur.gov.lv

²² www.vid.gov.lv

²³ www.meteo.lv/public/

²⁴ www.zemesgramata.lv/show_internal.asp?id=12

address data quality monitoring system has been developed and is functioning, allowing to record the erroneous and faulty address data.

The State Real Estate Cadastre Information Systems are subject to regular monitoring regarding the quality of textual and technical data. The number of the State Real Estate Cadastre information system users is being gradually increased subject to technical and administrative viability. As at July 2006, 250 users have been provided access to the State Real Estate Cadastre, using the State Land Service²⁵ system data.

The Electronic Declaration System allows for the submission of the due annual reports to the State Revenue Service. The registered users of the State Revenue Service Electronic Declaration System can submit and, using the e-signature allocated by the State Revenue Service, to also sign the following reports: annual report of an insurance company, consolidated annual report of an insurance company, annual report of a credit institution, consolidated annual report of a credit institution, annual report of a religious organisation and annual report of a company. The State Revenue Service allows for submission of 71 various types of electronic documents, including also completion of the electronic customs declaration. Thus, 98% of the total of declarations, reports and the relevant tax calculations specified by law as due for submission to the State Revenue Service by tax payers can now be submitted, using the State Revenue Service Electronic Declaration System. The State Revenue Service has concluded agreements with 39 various institutions regarding exchange of information or online Internet connection.

In June 2005, the new version of the State Revenue Service Home Page²⁶ was launched, allowing for access to various consulting services and answers to customer queries submitted to the State Revenue Service electronically via the State Revenue Service Home Page. In addition, the State Revenue Service Home Page also provides access to valuable information regarding the dues taxes and dues, as well as various application and order forms.

The Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs²⁷ portal in its turn allows people to request information regarding their place of living registered under the Residential Register. On such occasion, the data requested will be appropriately documented and mailed to the declared place of living of the person.

The Central Statistical Bureau²⁸ system "**e-Report**" allows the user to submit the relevant statistical data electronically; currently there are 67 statistical reports where the data can be entered electronically, including also the report on IT usage by companies, budget and local government institutions, report on services, employment.

On 27 February 2006, an interdepartmental agreement No. 2/50-2006 "**On exchange of information**" has been concluded between the State Revenue Service and Central Statistical Bureau. Under this agreement, the State Revenue

²⁵ www.vzd.gov.lv

²⁶ www.vid.gov.lv

²⁷ www.pmlp.gov.lv

²⁸ www.csb.lv

Service shall provide such electronic information that will allow the Central Statistical Bureau to ensure fulfilment of the National Programme of Statistical Information, and reduce the work load of the legal persons and self-employed persons in drawing up the due statistical reports.

In January 2006, the **Electronic Procurement State Agency**²⁹ was set up, which in May 2006 took over the e-procurement system pilot project from the Procurement Monitoring Bureau. The Electronic Procurement State Agency aims to develop the e-procurement system, making it available to all public sector bodies.

Amendments to the infrastructure are being facilitated at the moment, and the relevant procurement documentation and procedures are being drawn up so that to allow for concluding of the three general agreements and facilitate centralised procurement of new items appropriate to the Law on Procurement, thereby also allowing the other state and local government bodies to join the e-procurement system.

Various measures have also been taken in Latvia so that to provide access to **electronic information on the job vacancies in Latvia on the European job vacancy data base portal**.³⁰

In July 2006, an interdepartmental agreement was concluded with the Information Centre of the Ministry of the Interior of the Republic of Latvia **on implementing the e-service launch project**, which will allow the residents to submit electronic requests for information regarding criminal record of natural persons, administrative penalties applied to natural persons, as well as verify whether the persons documents are not included in the overdue documents register and submit electronic applications to the State Police.

By 2009, **the citizens are likely to be in a position to place electronic orders for various information or licences**; priority in this regard will be given to adjustments, facilitating electronic orders for information and licences issued by the State Revenue Service, Residential Register, State Land Service, Enterprise Register, the Road Traffic Safety Directorate³¹, State Social Insurance Agency³², and the Penalty Register. The said and other residential e-services are being developed within the framework of the ERDF National Programme.

Work on the development of the e-service **“Initial residential income declaration”** has been commenced under the ERDF National Programme State Integrated Information Systems. The project will facilitate development of the relevant Information Systems allowing for acquisition of the initial declaration data from the registers.

Development of Public Domain Content

²⁹ www.eiva.gov.lv

³⁰ http://www.nva.lv/index.php?new_lang=en

³¹ www.csdd.lv

³² www.vsaa.lv

The state institutions shall publish information on the Internet appropriate to the requirements concerning the structure, content and search functionality of Home Pages laid down in the Cabinet of Ministers Instruction No.7 of 04.12.2001 **“Order in which state institutions shall place information on the Internet”**.

This Cabinet of Ministers instruction defines the order in which ministries and the Secretariats of Special Assignment Ministers, as well as the establishments reporting to these ministries shall publish information on the Internet.

All state institutions in the country are imposed to use a unified domain name and e-mail accounts mechanism.

Full name and abbreviated versions of the organisations and companies registered under the Enterprise Register of the Republic of Latvia (spelt either using the Latvian letters and/or replacing Latvian letters with the relevant Latin alphabet letters without using diacritic marks), as well as the trademarks registered under the Patent Office of the Republic of Latvia can be registered as domain names by their legal owners only (this provision is not applicable to those trademarks, which have been submitted for approval by the Patent Office of the Republic of Latvia, but have not been registered yet).

Ministries and the Secretariats of Special Assignment Ministers shall develop their own Home Pages; a decision as to which of the establishments reporting to the ministries need to set up their own Home Pages shall be adopted by the relevant ministry or secretariat. The Cabinet of Ministers instruction also defines that the Home Pages shall be set up by those institutions, which provide services to natural and legal persons.

The draft Cabinet of Ministers Regulation **“Order in which institutions shall place information on the Internet”** has been drawn up in Latvia, determining that Internet access shall be provided to information on the documents, which are either submitted or drawn up by the institution and made subject to public approval, the working groups and boards of the institution and ways of participation in these. The draft regulation also obliges the institutions to provide for availability of various interactive elements on their Home Pages, such as "Customer query", "Guest book", „Comments”, „Forum”/„Discussion”, and „Query”.

Since 2006 the citizens will not have to spend their time surfing through various Home Pages, as the e-services will be centralised and provided through single point of access – the national portal www.latvija.lv³⁴.

The Cabinet of Ministers Home Page³⁵ has been launched under the ERDF National draft programme **“E-Government Portfolio”**, advising the public of the policy planning and draft regulatory documents submitted for approval by the State Chancellery and Cabinet of Ministers. Launch of the Cabinet of

³³ www.latvia.lv

³⁴ www.latvia.lv

³⁵ www.mk.gov.lv

Ministers Home Page under the said draft programme has facilitated the following measures:

- A section “public co-participation” has been provided on the Home Page, containing all-inclusive information of ways of public participation in the Cabinet of Ministers decision-making processes,
- Coordination of ministerial activities has been ensured in issuing press releases and publishing these on the Cabinet of Ministers Home Page,
- The total of about 358 press releases have been issued regarding the policy planning and draft regulatory documents submitted to and reviewed by the Cabinet of Ministers, Cabinet of Ministers Committee and State Secretary Meeting,
- News letter functionality has been introduced, allowing for subscribing to latest information regarding the draft normative enactments, press releases, etc.

Based on the study **On Home Pages of state administration and local government institutions of the Republic of Latvia and other EU Member States (2005)**, the state institutions and part of the local governments, within the limits of their financial capacity, pay attention to, though sometimes insufficient, upgrade of their Home Pages and regular information updates of these, which is best seen from the review of the Home Pages of ministries and major state institutions.

Based on the “**Evaluation study on the availability and efficiency of electronic services in Latvia**” of 2005 Internet Home Pages have been appraised highly by the younger generation, who have claimed it to be the most efficient source of information of all. The study forecasts that in 30 years 80% of the country’s population will regard the Home Page to either be a very efficient or most efficient of all sources of information. The leading online service providers in the country are the news portals and conventional media home pages, news agencies and providers of inquiry services (including also services provided jointly with the state information data bases), social networks, mobile entertainment service providers, banks and Internet shops. The leading banks facilitate up to 90% online payment transactions.

The study “**The problems faced by small and medium enterprises and residential groups in receiving and using public administration and e-commerce services**” (2006) has lead to the following conclusion: the capacity and skills of members of the society to apply the latest technologies plays an important role in using the Information Society benefits at best advantage and promoting the development of knowledge-based economy. 28% of population, who do not use the Internet, have admitted that use of technologies is hindered by lack of the relevant ICT skills. These skills are recorded the lowest for groups of society at the highest risk of social exclusion, such as the unemployed – over 65%, especially persons aged above 35 with incomplete secondary school education. The employers, too, have pointed to the low level of computer literacy of their employees.

In 2006, the educational system IT programme **“Information and communications technologies to quality education”** for 2007 –2013 was approved in Latvia. The programme aims to ensure significant increase of education quality, based on high ICT usage, so that every member of the society were provided easy access to knowledge and various education services, which will thereby allow to optimise the operation, management and planning of the education system.

The Action Plan of the Government of the Republic of Latvia for 2006 – 2010 has set a target to define Latvia’s national e-inclusion strategy and action plan by 2008 so that to contribute to e-availability and increase the level of digital skills, paying special attention to the disabled, senior persons, unemployed and other groups of society at highest risk of social exclusion.

Several projects have been carried out within the framework of the National programme **“Support for the introduction of active employment measures”**³⁶ for 2004 -2006 aimed to provide for training, higher qualification or re-qualifying of the unemployed (adults, young people and disabled) and job seekers, contributing also to computer and Internet literacy of these persons.

Organisation of people with disabilities and their friends **“APEIRONS”**³⁷ has facilitated the **“Open Door”** project and other activities aimed to contribute to employment, education and social integration of the disabled, as well as their computer literacy and ICT skills.

The Latvian Information Technology and Telecommunications Association (LIKTA) under the project **Latvija@World**³⁸ has facilitated various education programmes and projects aimed to contribute to training of both the general public and groups at highest risk of social exclusion. By participating in the project, the members of society can at no charge to themselves acquire basic computer skills, or undergo an advanced computer literacy programme. The teaching staff and relevant training infrastructure (computer classes) have been made available throughout the country, yet the capacity of these is insufficient to meet the current demand.

In 2006, the project Latvija@World urged for higher public participation in training of the society, launching a campaign **“Open the window to the world!”**. The purpose of the campaign was to attract finances to allow for training of the target audience. Both projects were co-financed by the European Social Fund and state budget.

Within the framework of the project **“Computer and Internet literacy training of the unemployed in Latvia”** (2004–2006) a new computer literacy programme has been drawn up targeted at the unemployed so that to increase competitiveness of these people in the labour market. In 2006, the initiative Latvija@World was focused on 18 regions in Latvia, and by January 2007 more than 11 000 persons had undergone computer literacy programmes of

³⁶ www.lm.gov.lv/doc_up/AKTIVIE_PASAKUMI.doc

³⁷ www.apeirons.lv/?men=eng&p=22

³⁸ www.latvijapasaule.lv

various skill level; 1 500 of these persons underwent the training in the newly set up computer class in Riga.

In January 2007, under the project Latvija@Pasaule, basic computer literacy training for the inhabitants of Riga, the capital city of Latvia, was commenced. Under this programme, 500 residents of Riga are likely to undergo the training. The training programme has been updated, including also acquisition of skills allowing to connect the Internet without assistance.

Computer literacy training courses in Latvia are also conducted by the **State Employment Agency**³⁹.

In 2004, a new primary school IT curriculae was also introduced along with a secondary school curriculae compliant with the European Computer Driving Licence (ECDL).

Commencing 2008, the school graduates will have sufficient ICT skills allowing for allocation of the ECDL.

Reaffirming the equitable balance between the interests of rights – holders and the public interest

Currently, Internet is used by more than one third of total population of the country. Regardless of the increase in the number of Internet users, the Ministry's of the Interior "**Informative report on the operational results of the State Police for the first six months of 2006 and measures taken to upgrade the performance of the State Police**" shows that the level of computer piracy in Latvia has gone down by about 20% since 1999. There are Cybercrime Elimination Division (as of 2003) and Intellectual Property Protection Division (as of 2005) functioning under the Economy Policy Board of Chief Criminal Police Board of State Police under the guidance of the Ministry of the Interior, which are responsible for combating crime, including also computer crime and infringement of copyright. Cooperation has been established with both entrepreneurs and state institutions of the country to allow for protection of intellectual property, thereby contributing to the elimination of computer crime. Regular control measures are carried out, leading to confiscation of the products and goods that have not been licensed.

Latvia has undertaken the following measures aimed at facilitating the decline of computer piracy in Latvia:

1. Setting up of the Intellectual Property Right Protection Department under the Economy Policy Board, Chief Criminal Police Board, State Police, Ministry of the Interior (number of control measures has been increased from 2 – 3 times a month in 2004 to 2 – 3 times a week in 2005),
2. Cooperation with the State Revenue Service (control measures have been introduced as applicable to traders and users of software;

³⁹ www.nva.lv

joint seminars targeted at the State Revenue Service inspectors and taxpayers have been held throughout the country);

3. Memorandum of Understanding concluded with the Procurement Monitoring Bureau,

4. Public prosecutors have been short listed for the purpose of dealing with the issue and trained appropriately; protection of intellectual property has been listed among the priorities of the Prosecutors Office,

5. Setting up of the Intellectual Property Office and a special group of experts,

6. PHARE project launched aimed at contributing to protection of intellectual property in Latvia.

Observation of copyright is one of the main pre-requisites for developing the Information Society. This aspect has become even more important after Latvia's accession to the European Union, with the country participating in various international agreements.

On 6 April 2000, the **Law on Copyright**⁴⁰ was adopted by the Saeima of the Republic of Latvia (the law is in force as of 11 May 2000). The Law on Copyright complies with the Bern Convention, the Rome Convention for the Protection of Performers, Producers of Phonograms and Broadcasting Organisations, TRIPS agreement (the WTO agreement introducing intellectual property law into the international trading) and the World Intellectual Property Organisation (WIPO) agreements.

Since Latvia's accession to the European Union, various EU regulations have been put in force in Latvia. The Law on Copyright has been drawn up in compliance with the following EU directives:

- the Council Directive 91/250/EEC of 14th May 1991 on the legal protection of computer programs,
- Council Directive 92/100/EEC on rental right and lending right and on certain rights related to copyright in the field of intellectual property,
- Council Directive 93/83/EEC on the coordination of certain rules concerning copyright and rights related to copyright applicable to satellite broadcasting and cable retransmission,
- Council Directive 93/98/EEC of 29 October 1993 harmonizing the term of protection of copyright and certain related rights,
- Directive 96/9/EC of the European Parliament of the Council on the legal protection of databases,
- Directive 2001/29/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 22nd May 2001 on the harmonisation of certain aspects of copyright and related rights in the information society, commonly known as the EU Copyright Directive (EUCD),
- Directive 2001/81/EC on the resale right for the benefit of the author of an original work of art,

⁴⁰ <http://www.likumi.lv/doc.php?id=5138>

- Directive 2004/48/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 29th April 2004 on the enforcement of intellectual property rights.

In addition to the above EU directives, the Law on Copyright of the Republic of Latvia also meets the obligations imposed by the WIPO Copyright Treaty, WIPO Performances and Phonograms Treaty (WPPT), and the WTO TRIPS agreement.

Given the obligations of Latvia as a Member State of the EU, WTO and WIPO, implementation of the Law on Copyright at home is conducted in compliance with the international copyright laws.

As determined by Section 18 of the law, the restrictions imposed by this law as applicable to copyright shall be enforced to such extent that these were not in breach of regulations concerning use of the work of art of the author, and did not restrict unreasonably the legal rights of the author that are in compliance with the international and EU provisions.

As determined by the **Law on State Information Systems**⁴¹, the holder of the state information systems, appropriate to the relevant legislative enactments, shall ensure, and be responsible for, use of licensed software or such software that has been specially designed for said state information system in line with the existing standards of Latvia.

In 2005, cooperation agreement was concluded among the Republic of Latvia, Microsoft Corporation and SIA "Microsoft Latvia" so that to contribute to state administration and education. The agreement provides for licensing of all Microsoft software used in educational establishments and state administration institutions of the country.

In 2007, the Ministry of Education and Science was allocated budget resources so that to allow for licensing of school software. In addition to this, licensing of software used in state sector will also be proceeded this year. For this purpose, additional support has been provided, thereby ensuring ongoing decline of piracy level in the country. The users are provided more information regarding the consequences of computer piracy, including also the potential penalties for unauthorised use of software.

Active work in this regard has also been undertaken by the non-governmental organisation Copyright and Communication Consultation Agency/The Latvian Copyright Agency⁴² (AKKA/LAA) so that to collectively manage the rights of copyright holders. AKKA/LAA represents the interests of more than 3000 authors in Latvia, as well as 94 members of various overseas copyright organisations.

Commencing 17th January 2007, the Latvian committee of the public organisation "**Business Software Alliance**"⁴³ is functioning in Latvia with the main purpose of protecting copyright on computer software and combating infringement of these rights, representing the interests of its members. The Business Software Alliance is engaged at organising and holding various

⁴¹ www.likumi.lv/doc.php?id=62324

⁴² www.akka-laa.lv

⁴³ www.bsa.org/latvia/

campaigns and events aimed to advise the public of the consequences of infringement of copyright on software, as well as measures taken to combat unauthorised use of software. The Business Software Alliance Home Page advises of computer piracy in Latvia, based on the results of the various campaigns and events conducted by BSA for this purpose.

The Business Software Alliance focuses primarily on facilitating cooperation with the government, judicial institutions, and representatives of industry; work is also proceeded to draw up amendments to the existing laws and participate in preparing new proposals regarding combating computer piracy.

As reported by the “Business Software Alliance”, in 2005 the level of computer piracy in Latvia equalled 58%. Commencing 2001, the situation in this regard is reported as stable or showing actual decrease in view of the fast increase in the number of PCs and Internet users.

As of 10th October 2003, a public organisation “Copyright Association in the Baltics” has been functioning in Latvia. The main objective of the organisation is to contribute to protection of intellectual property and combating infringement of copyright in Latvia. The organisation focuses on multimedia and film and video production, providing for protection of intellectual property of manufacturers of the said, representing them in the local market and popularising their products, as well as combating piracy in Latvia.

Conclusion

E-policy planning guidelines in Latvia have been defined appropriate to the guidelines laid down by the long-term concept **“Latvia’s growth model: placing the human first”** (adopted by the Saeima of the Republic of Latvia on 26th October 2005) and **Latvia’s National Development Plan for 2007 – 2013:**

- To ensure equal opportunities to all members of the society to use information and communication technologies, e-services and content,
- To reduce the digital divide by contributing to higher living standards of the society and providing for more public benefits.

Latvia’s Information Society policy has been based on the **Information Society Development Guidelines for 2006 –2013 approved** by way of the Cabinet of Ministers Order of 19 July 2006. The Information Society Development Guidelines for 2006 –2013 **stands** for a policy planning document, which has been defined appropriate to the Lisbon Strategy, EU initiative “i2010 – A European Information Society for Growth and Employment” and the documents⁴⁴ adopted during the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS), laying down the policy guidelines regarding the development of the Information Society in Latvia until 2013.

⁴⁴ www.itu.int/wsisis/

With implementing the Information Society Development Guidelines, all members of the society in Latvia will be in a position to freely access and use such information resources and services, which are based on modern communication technologies.

The Information Society Development Guidelines provide for a significant increase in the number of Internet connections and users, both in households and businesses, allowing the society, businesses and state administration to use the ICT benefits at best advantage and for the purpose of obtaining the relevant knowledge.

As determined by the Information Society Development Guidelines, online access to employment, social and rehabilitation services, culture, education, health care, creative development, entertainment, etc. issues allow for inclusion and integration of the groups of society at highest risk of exclusion, contributing also to welfare and living standards of people with low income and residents of remote areas.

The Information Society Development Guidelines provide the basis for defining other - medium-term - policy planning documents in Latvia, contributing also to various intermediate measures and activities.

The country's current policy is focused on facilitating the development, introduction, availability and quality of e-services. The members of the society are urged and motivated to acquire the relevant ICT skills, thereby contributing also to the development of the e-service market. Infrastructure is being developed at the moment to allow for the launch of the e-signature and promote e-commerce in the country. In addition, various e-service channels are also being developed and the relevant adjustments made to the customer service centres to meet the existing demand.

And last, but not least, the country also facilitates the development of the e-learning and e-health projects, as well as the availability of various digital resources (museums, archives, libraries) and public sources of information, thereby contributing to the culture infrastructure.