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Consolidation of the Principle of Democratic Elections in the Law of the Latvian People

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The article provides an analysis of the gradual consolidation of the principle of democratic elections in the election law of the Latvian people during the period from the abolition of serfdom in the Baltic Governorates of the Russian Empire at the beginning of the 19th century until the adoption of the *Satversme* [Constitution] of the Republic of Latvia on 15 February 1922. Abolition of serfdom was chosen as a point of reference for the publication, because "emancipation" gave liberty to the majority of Latvians as persons belonging to the peasant class. Until proclamation of the Republic of Latvia (1918), Latvians gained election experience in electing the councils of civil parishes, cities and the State Duma of the Russian Empire. None of the elections held in the Russian Empire can be considered to be democratic, since the principle of voters' equality was not complied with. Demand for democratic elections as denial of inequality consolidated among the Latvian people by the end of the 19th century. It is proven by the projects of Latvia's autonomy, elaborated even before the democratic February Revolution in the Russian Empire (1917). Following the proclamation of the Republic of Latvia, the legislator only enshrined (documented) in legal acts the will of the Latvian people to elect state and local government officials democratically.

Keywords: democracy, abolition of serfdom, electoral rights, freedom, civil parish community.

Contents

Introduction

Latvians have had to permanently justify and defend their right to live in an independent, democratic and legal country. In this regard, we can mention the explanation written more than 100 years ago by professor **Kār**lis Dišlers about the need to include in Article 1 of "Declaration on the State of Latvia" of 27 May 1920 two words with, actually, identical meaning – "Latvia is a **self-standing** and **independent** republic with a democratic state order" – in the Second Provisional Constitution (*Satversme*) of the Republic of Latvia[1]:

> *[…] one cannot say that this minor verbosity is out of place because the nationalistic "united great" Russia, which, assumedly, once will replace the bolshevist soviet Russia, will use all means to combat and contest the independence of the new states, which emerged from the ruins of Russia, perhaps it will even recognise the self-standing of these states "to a certain extent" but, at the same time, by this it will try to impose upon these states dependence from Russia, "to a certain extent". Therefore, it is important that the Latvian people, through the Constitutional Assembly, very strictly and clearly have formulated their will: to lead a totally self-standing life of the state, independent from any other state*.[2]

The right to live in a self-standing, independent, democratic state governed by the rule of law is not a gift of fate. Professor Rudolf von Jhering noted, for a good reason, in his world-famous publication "Der Kampf um's Recht" (The Struggle for Law) that peace without fight, pleasure without labour belong to the times in Paradise. Every right in this world has been obtained through struggle. Moreover, one should not only be able to gain rights through struggle but should be ready to defend them at any moment.[3]

In the 20th century, Latvians successfully fought for their right to live in a democratic state governed by the rule of law twice; however, until now there have been no studies in legal science, that would explore how the understanding of democratic elections have become consolidated in the law of the Latvian people. Therefore, the author defines as the aim for this article the initiation of scholarly discussion about how the right to elect and the right to be elected to, in accordance with the principle of democracy, state and local government decision-making bodies gradually consolidated into the law of the Latvian people in the period from the beginning of the 19th century until the adoption of the *Satversme* of the Republic of Latvia on 15 February 1922. The beginning of the 19th century was chosen as the point of reference for this publication, because this was the time when serfdom was abolished in the Baltic Governorates of the Russian Empire and the majority of Latvians, as persons belonging to the peasant class, became free.

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1 The Second Provisional *Satversme* of the Latvia consisted of "Declaration on the State of Latvia" and "Provisional Regulation on the Order of the Latvian State of 1 June 1920]. See *Dišlers, K.* Ievads Latvijas valststiesību zinātnē [Introduction to the science of Latvian state law]. Rīga: TNA, 2017, p. 85.

2 *Dišlers, K.* Latvijas pagaidu konstitūcija [Provisional Constitution of Latvia]. Tieslietu Ministrijas Vēstnesis, 1920, No. 2/3, p. 50.

3 *Jhering, R. von.* Der Kampf um's Recht. Zum hundertsten Todesjahr des Autors herausgegeben von Felix Ermacora [The Struggle for Law. Edited by Felix Ermacora for the centenary of the author's death]. Available: Bhttps://www.koeblergerhard.de/Fontes/JheringDerKampfumsRecht_hgvErmacora1992.pdf [last viewed 15.05.2023].

1. Democracy of the civil parish

Professor Immanuel Kant has written that a human being has only one primeval, innate right and this right is: "Liberty […] insofar as it can exist together with every other arbitrariness according to universal law, is this only original innate right to which every human being is entitled by virtue of his humanity."[4] Thus, human liberty is the point of reference for other rights. For the majority of Latvian people, abolition of serfdom also meant that they acquired the status of a free person. Therefore, the author holds that the abolition of serfdom became the point of reference for embodiment of the principle of democracy in the law of the Latvian people.

In the Latvian-populated Baltic Governorates of the Russian Empire, serfdom was abolished during the reign of Alexander I Romanov (*Aleksandr I Romanov*) (1801–1825) by the law of 25 August 1817 in the Governorate of Courland[5] and by the law of 26 March 1819 in the Governorate Livonia[6]. The Latvian-populated lands of the current Latgale (three districts) in the 19th century were part of the Vitebsk Governorate. The Vitebsk Governorate was not considered to be part of the Baltic Governorates. Here, serfdom was abolished later, on the basis of the Manifesto of 19 February 1861[7], issued during the reign of Alexander II Romanov (*Aleksandr II Romanov*) (1855–1881).

After serfdom was abolished, peasants had the obligation and the right to organise and administer the self-government of the civil parish community themselves.

The assembly, the court and the elders of the civil parish were defined as self-government bodies in the Baltic Governorates.

The civil parish assembly was convened on the initiative of the estate's police/board (hereafter – the estate) or with its permission. In the Governorate of Livonia, only one category (*razryad*) of peasants could be invited to the assembly, unless the matter pertained to the interests of the entire civil parish.[8] Predominantly, these were farm owners.[9] In the Governorate of Courland, if servants were invited, then farm owners and servants voted separately. In the case of unresolvable difference of opinion between the farm owners and the servants, the final decision was made by the estate.[10]

The civil parish assembly proposed three candidates for each office (office of the elder and the judge of the civil parish) for three years, and the estate approved one

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[4] „Freiheit (Unabhängigkeit von eines Anderen nötigender Willkür), sofern sie mit jedes Anderen Freiheit nach einem allgemeinem Gesetz zusammen bestehen kann, ist diese einzige, ursprüngliche, jedem Menschen, kraft seiner Menschheit, zustehende Recht." See: *Kant, I.* Die Metaphysik der Sitten [The Metaphysics of Morals]. Stuttgart: Philipp Reclam jun., 2011, Art. E, p. 76.

[5] Uchrezhdenie o Kurlyandskih" krest'yanax" [Decree on the Peasants of Courland] (25.08.1817). Polnoe sobranie zakonov" Rossijskoj imperii [hereafter – PSZ], Vol. XXXIV, No. 27024, 1817. Available: https://nlr.ru/e-res/law_r/search.php?regim=4&page=340&part=737 [last viewed 15.05.2023]. Hereafter, the Internet address and the date of viewing will not be indicated for the laws of the Russian Empire.

[6] Polozhenie o Liflyandskih" krest'yanax" [Regulation on the Peasants of Livonia] (26.03.1819). PSZ, Vol. XXXVI, No. 27735, 1819.

[7] Manifest (19.02.1861). O Vsemilostivejshem" darovanii krepostnym" lyudyam" prav" sostoyaniya svobodnyh" sel'skih" obyvatelej i ob" ustrojstve ih" byta [Manifesto. On the All-Gracious Granting to the Serfs of the Right to the Status of Free Rural People and Their Living Conditions]. PSZ, Vol. XXXVI, No. 36650, 1861.

[8] Polozhenie o Liflyandskih" krest'yanax", Art. 72, 77.

[9] *Kalniņš, V.* Latvijas PSR valsts un tiesību vēsture. I. Feodālisma un topošā kapitālisma laikmets XI–XIX gs. [The History of the State and the Law of the Latvian SSR. I. The Age of Feudalism and Nascent Capitalism XI–XIX c]. Rīgā: Zvaigzne, 1972, p. 264.

[10] Uchrezhdenie o Kurlyandskih" krest'yanax", Art. 46–47.

of the candidates. The estate could decide to not approve any of the candidates and demand new elections. After candidates were proposed repeatedly, one of the three candidates had to be approved to the office. Although under the estate's tutelage, by and large, the principle of democratic rotation of officials was introduced.[11] However, the research by Austra Mieriņa shows that many estates did not always implement the tutelage in a legally correct way because they tried to force peasants, unlawfully, to propose candidates preferred by the estate.[12] Such actions by the estate, clearly, hindered consolidation of the principle of democracy in the self-government of a civil parish.

In the Governorate of Courland, the elder of the civil parish was also the chairman of the civil parish court. Apart from the elder of the civil parish, (at least) three more elders and assessors (members) of the parish court were elected. The majority of elders had to be farm owners, whereas the assessors, in equal numbers, were elected by farm owners and servants.[13] In the Governorate of Livonia, the chairman of the civil parish court did not perform the duties of the civil parish elder. This marked separation between the civil parish court from the civil parish elders. Similarly to the Governorate of Courland, the civil parish community was represented by elders, with the difference that their number did not exceed two persons. Only the persons belonging to the class of farm owners could be elected chairman of the civil parish court, but it was preferable to elect peasants from among the farm owners as parish elders. Both farm owners and servants could be unconditionally elected only as the assessors of the civil parish court.[14] Thus, there was social inequality in the rights of farm owners and servants to hold the supreme positions in the civil parish community.

Following the abolition of serfdom, the self-governance of Latgalians was organised in accordance with the model of domestic (Western) governorates of Russia, taking into consideration the regional particularities. Along the same lines as the Baltic Governorates, the peasants in Latgale could also elect peasant officials . In difference to the Baltic Governorates, peasants of Latgale, apart from civil parish officials and peasant judges, were electing also the officials of a village.[15]

During the period of Soviet power, professor Voldemārs Kalniņš wrote that the civil parish assemblies had had only one task, i.e., to elect the civil parish officials, without analysing the process of democratising the civil parish community, introduced by the abolition of serfdom.[16] This approach, substantially, does not reveal the historical significance of abolition.

At present, obviously, the election of civil parish officials, defined in law, would not be considered to be sufficiently democratic. However, the right, granted to peasants

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[11] Uchrezhdenie o Kurlyandskih" krest'yanax", Art. 33–35; Polozhenie o Liflyandskih" krest'yanax", Art. 90, 98, 101.

[12] *Mieriņa, A.* Agrārās attiecības un zemnieku stāvoklis Kurzemē XIX gs. II pusē. [Agrarian Relations and the Situation of Peasants in Kurzeme in the 2nd Half of XIX c.]. Rīgā: Zinātne, 1968, pp. 212–246.

[13] Uchrezhdenie o Kurlyandskih" krest'yanax", Art. 29–33.

[14] Polozhenie o Liflyandskih" krest'yanax", Art. 89, 98.

[15] Vysochajshe utverzhdennoe Obshchee Polozhenie o krest'yanah", vyshedshih" iz" krepostnoj zavisimosti [The Most Supremely Approved General Regulations on Peasants Freed from the Dependence in Serfdom]. PSZ, Vol. XXXVI, No. 36657, 1861; Vysochajshe utverzhdennoe Obshchee Polozhenie o pozimel'nom" ustrojstve krest'yan", vodvorennyh" na pomeshchich'ih" zemlyah" v" guberniyah": Vilenskoj, Grodnenskoj, Kovenskoj, Minskoj i chasti Vitebskoj [The Most Supremely Approved General Regulations on Land Arrangement for [Peasants] Settled on Nobles' Lands in the Governorates of Vilnius, Grodno, Kaunas, Minsk and Part of Vitebsk Governorate]. PSZ, Vol. XXXVI, No. 36665, 1861, etc.

[16] *Kalniņš, V.* Latvijas PSR, pp. 254–269.

more than 200 years ago, to elect and to be elected as a civil parish official, should not be underestimated. Henceforth, the civil parish officials had to have the skills not only to care for other members of the parish (e.g., be responsible for paying taxes, care for the disabled, set up schools, etc.[17]) but also be able to read and write and make decisions, substantiated by legal norms. The requirement of a certain level of education and ability to apply legal provisions turned into a major incentive for further emancipation of Latvian peasants in the atmosphere of democratic values.

On 19 February 1866, the law "On Public Administration at the Level of Civil Parishes in the Baltic Provinces"[18] (hereafter – the Civil Parish Administration Law) was adopted. The Civil Parish Administration Law changed the relations between the state, the estate and the civil parish.[19] The purpose of the law was to free the civil parish community from the estate's tutelage[20], i.e., to give the right to peasants "to arrange the civic and social life of local peasants on the foundations of self-standing and independence from the estate's influence"[21] and to unify the administration of civil parishes in the Baltic Governorates. Almost 50 years of freedom had proven the ability of Latvian peasants to reason and act independently. Hence, the estates' tutelage had become redundant. The civil parish courts (in the Governorate of Livonia) and district courts (*Hauptmannsgericht*) (in the Governorate of Courland) were entrusted with supervising the functioning of peasant self- administration. On the basis of "Provisional Regulation on Changing the Composition and Jurisdiction of Peasant Bodies" of 9 July 1889, the office of a commissioner for peasant matters was introduced.[22] Thus, the state took over supervision of the functioning of peasant self-administration.

After the adoption of the Civil Parish Administration Law, a civil parish did not become yet a territorial unit of self-administration. The estate remained outside. All registered peasants – farm owners (leaseholders), servants (workers), as well as persons who did not belong to the peasant class but were owners or lessees of peasants' land plots (homes) belonged to the civil parish community.[23] The administration of civil parish community consisted of four bodies: the general civil parish assembly (*obshchij volostnoj skhod*) (hereafter – the assembly), contingent of deputies (*skhod vybornyh*), the civil parish elder with his assistants (*volostnoj starshina s pomoshchnikami*) and the civil parish court (*volostnoj sud*).[24]

Attendance at the assembly was mandatory for all farm owners and lessees of farms (hereafter – the farm owners) and for every tenth elected representative from

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[17] *Ābers, B.* Vidzemes zemnieku stāvoklis 19. gs. pirmā pusē [The Situation of Vidzeme's Peasants in the First Half of the 19th Century]. Rīga: Grāmatu apgādniecība A. Gulbis, 1936, pp. 214–231.

[18] Polozhenie o volostnom" obshchestvennom" upravlenii v" Ostzejskih" guberniyah" [Pribaltijskih" guberniyah"] [On Public Administration of the Civil Parish in Baltic Governorates] (19.02.1866). PSZ, Vol. XLI, No. 43034, 1866.

[19] *Lazdiņš, J.* Abolition of serfdom and organisation of civil parish communities. In: Latvia and Latvians. Vol. II. Collection of scholarly articles. Riga: Latvian Academy of Sciences, 2018, pp. 341–342.

[20] *Schmidt, O.* Rechtsgeschichte Liv-, Est- und Curlands [Legal History of Livonia, Estonia and Curland]. Jurjew (Dorpat): In Commission bei E. J. Karow, 1895, p. 265.

[21] Polozhenie o volostnom" obshchestvennom" upravlenii v" Ostzejskih" guberniyah" [Pribaltijskih" guberniyah"], [introduction].

[22] I. O preobrazovanii sudebnoj chasti v" Pribaltijskih" guberniyah" i II. O preobrazovanii krect'yanskih" prisutstvennyh mest" Pribaltijskih" gubernij. [I I. On the Transformation of the Judiciary in the Baltic Governorates and II. On the Transformation of the Peasant Offices of the Baltic Governorates]. PSZ, Vol. IX, No. 6188, 1889, Art. 1, 8.

[23] *Mucinieks, P.* Latvijas pašvaldību iekārta [Latvian local government system]. Rīgā: LU Studentu padomes grāmatnīcas izdevums, 1938, p. 124.

[24] Pagasta pārvaldes likums, Art. 4.

among the servants. The latter were sometimes scornfully called the tithe-men[25] or gnats.[26] The assembly elected, for the term of three years, all officials of the civil parish (the elder, assistants, judges and the contingent of deputies). The assembly was competent to decide if it was attended by the civil parish elder and at least half of the assembly's members. The decisions were adopted by reaching a common agreement or by a majority vote of those present.[27]

Compared to abolition laws, the rights of the civil parish elder as the supreme representative of the civil parish executive power were consolidated, and a new institution had been added – the contingent of deputies (representatives of the civil parish community). The contingent of deputies signified the decision-making body in matters of the civil parish community and it had the competence to deal with the property, assets of the civil parish, examination of complaints and requests, setting salaries for the officials, and the like.[28]

The Civil Parish Administration Law did not comply with the requirements for civil society. It did not decrease the gap between the estate and the civil parish and, substantially, did not change anything in the fixed structure of classes and social strata. Women were not given electoral rights and farm owners enjoyed privileges, vis-à-vis servants, to be elected elders of the civil parish and chairmen of the civil parish courts. In Latvia of the inter-war period, assistant professor at the University of Latvia Pēteris Mucinieks, assessing the Civil Parish Administration Law from the perspective of democracy, valued it even lower than laws on the abolition of serfdom because, at least formally, after the abolition of serfdom all servants could be invited to the civil parish assembly. This opinion cannot be upheld. As noted above, following the abolition of serfdom, only one category of peasants (usually these were farm owners) could be invited to the civil parish assembly or farm owners and servants voted separately, whereas the Civil Parish Administration Law guaranteed that servants were represented at the civil parish assembly. The social strata of farm owners and servants were not closed. A servant could become a farm owner and a farm owner could be made a servant.[29] Therefore, the author is of the opinion that the Civil Parish Administration Law was closer to the principle of democracy than the abolition laws. In principle, P. Mucinieks admits it indirectly, by noting that the Civil Parish Administration Law, rather than the abolition laws, to a certain extent served as a model for the "Law on the *Satversme* of Latvian Civil Parishes" of 4 December 1918, adopted by the People's Council of the Republic of Latvia".[30]

Thus, following the abolition of serfdom, in the spirit of the times, the foundations for the understanding of a democratic and socially responsible civil parish community were laid. It is for good reason that, at the moment when the State of Latvia was created, the most outstanding poet of the Latvian nations Jānis Pliekšāns (Rainis) dreamt about socialist Latvia.[31]

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[25] *Mucinieks, P.* Latvijas pašvaldību iekārta, p. 125.

[26] *Kalniņš, V., Apsītis, R.* Latvijas PSR, p. 24.

[27] Pagasta pārvaldes likums, Art. 7.

[28] Pagasta pārvaldes likums, Art. 9–12, 15–24, 26–28.

[29] *Ābers, B.* Rundāles pagasta tiesas protokoli 1819.–28. g. [Records of the Court of Rundāle Civil Parish]. In: Tautas vēsturei. Veltījums profesoram Arvedam Švābem [For the People's History. Dedicated to Professor Arveds Švābe] 25.V.1888–25.V.1938. Rīga: Grāmatu apgādniecība A. Gulbis, 1938, p. 339; *Ābers, B.* Vidzemes zemnieku stāvoklis, p. 233

[30] *Mucinieks, P.* Latvijas pašvaldību iekārta, pp. 129–130.

[31] *Lazdiņš, J.* Laime Jāņa Pliekšāna (Raiņa) tiesību filozofijā [Happiness in Jānis Pliekšāns' (Rainis') philosophy of law]. Journal of the Institute of Latvian History, special edition, 2022, pp. 12–16.

Latvians were not represented in the knightly *Landtags* of the Baltics. Therefore, the author holds that the civil parish administration, based on electoral rights, for the majority of Latvian people turned into the sole "school of statehood" until the Republic of Latvia was proclaimed. Moreover, even before the judicial reform of the Russian Empire, launched on 20 November 1864[32], the principle of separation of the administrative and judicial power was integrated into the law on peasants of the Governorate of Livonia. The aim of the law on peasants was not linked to the policy of russification at the end of the 19th century.[33]

2. Experience in electoral rights outside the civil parish community

The Statute of 26 March 1877[34] provided that the Statute on Towns of the Russian Empire of 10 June 1870[35] (hereafter – the Statute on Towns of 1870) entered into force in the Baltic Governorates. Thus, the town councils (*Rath*) as self-administration bodies lost their significance.[36] The Statute on Towns of 1870 provided that, henceforth, the public administration of the town is implemented with the mediation of the electors' assembly of the town, the council and the board of the town.

The electors' assembly of the town was convened with the aim of electing the council of the town for the term of four years. A subject of the Russian Empire who had reached the age of 25 and paid taxes into the town's treasury could become a member of electors assembly of the town.[37] Electors of the town were divided into curiae in accordance with the total sum of the duty to be paid.[38] This complied with the principle, taken over from Prussia, that those who paid taxes/duties participated in the self-administration of the town, moreover, those who paid more were given greater rights.[39] For example, in the city of Riga, three curiae were established according to the amount of duties paid into the city's treasury. Although the number of electors in each curia was different, each curia elected 24 councillors, i.e.: there were 72 councillors in the city of Riga. It is estimated that only 3.4% of the inhabitants of Riga could participate in the first election of the Riga City Council. Latvians were represented in all curiae. Latvians even had relative majority in the third curia (1200 electors) because the second numerically largest group – Russians – was represented by 800 voters. In the coming years, the number of electors increased but

[32] See Uchrezhdeniya sudebnyh" ustanovlenij [Regulation on Courts]. PSZ, Vol. 39, part 2, No. 41475, 1864.

[33] See also *Luts-Sootak, M. Siimets-Gross, H.* Baltic peasants after emancipation – free and equal people or a new social estate in the estate-based society. In: Legal Science: Functions, Significance and Future in Legal Systems II (PDF). The 7th International Scientific Conference of the Faculty of Law of the University of Latvia 16–18 October 2019, Riga: University of Latvia (Collection of Research Papers), 2020, pp. 162–164. Available: https://www.apgads.lu.lv/izdevumi/brivpieejas-izdevumi/rakstu-krajumi/lu-juridiskas-fakultates-zinatniska-konference-2/ [last viewed 15.05.2023].

[34] Pravila o primenenii Vysochajshe utverzhdennogo, 16 Iyunya 1870 goda, Gorodovae polozheniya k" gorodam" Pribaltijskih" gubernij [On Applying the Most Supremely Approved Rules on Towns of 16 June 1870 in the Baltic Governorates] (26.03.1877). PSZ, Vol. LII, No. 57101, 1877.

[35] Gorodovoe polozhenie [Statute on Towns] (10.06.1870). PSZ, Vol. XLV, No. 48498, 1870.

[36] *Straubergs, J.* Rīgas vēsture. XII–XX gadsimts [History of Riga. XII–XX century]. Rīga: Latvijas Mediji, 2019, p. 577.

[37] Art. 15–17.

[38] Rīga. 1860–1917. Rīga: Zvaigzne, 1978, pp. 85–87 or Gorodovoe polozhenie (16.06.1870), Art. 24.

[39] *Mucinieks, P.* Latvijas pašvaldību iekārta, p. 56.

the population of Riga was also growing rapidly. Therefore, the number of Rigans with the right to vote proportionally decreased to 2.5%.[40]

On 11 June 1892, the new Statute on Towns was adopted[41] (hereafter – the Statute on Towns of 1892). The Statute on Towns of 1892 abolished the division of electors into curiae. Henceforth, a person who, at least one year before the election, owned or had in possession for life immovable property in the value of 300–3000 roubles, for which the duty had to be paid into the treasury of a town or town-like populated settlement, or a trade-production enterprise of the first-second guild category, was recognised as an elector. For example, in governorate cities like Riga, where population exceeded 100 000 inhabitants, the property qualification was 1500 roubles. It is estimated, based on the data of the Riga City election of 1893, that the number of electors with the right to vote substantially decreased. The study by professor Arveds Švābe shows that, in 1893, only 0.3 % of the total number of inhabitants in Riga, had the right to participate in the election.[42] Due to insufficient property qualification, the majority of the electors in the third curia had lost their elector's right, i.e., minor traders, inn keepers, men of letters, etc.[43], that is, the majority of Latvians. The situation was more favourable for Latvians in small towns. There, Latvians gradually achieved even majority in councils – in 1892 in Jaunjelgava, in 1897 in Valmiera, in 1913 in Ventspils, and elsewhere.[44]

Thus, the Statutes on Towns of 1870 and 1892 gave the right to participate in elections in accordance with the duty paid into the town treasury or property qualification. Such right to participate in the town administration could be characterised as being only conditionally democratic, because only a small number of wealthy townsmen could enjoy political rights in towns (in principle, it was democracy of plutocrats). Hence, for Latvia, later proclaimed as A democratic republic, the model of town administration in the political system of Russian Empire was unacceptable. However, at the end of the 19th century, even such legal regulation was to be considered a progress, because 1) the office of a town councillor no longer was "an office for life" and 2) a small number of Latvians "broke out" of the framework of city parish administration and started gaining experience in town administration.

The revolution of 1905 ushered into Russia changes of democratic nature. On 17 October 1905, during the reign of Nikolai II Romanov (1894–1917) Manifesto for the Improvement of the State Order[45] (hereafter – the Manifesto of 1905) was promulgated. In implementing the promises made in the Manifesto of 1905, on 23 April 1906, the Fundamental Laws of the State [46] (hereafter – the Fundamental Sate Laws) were promulgated. With the promulgation of the Fundamental State Laws, the Russian Empire became a constitutional monarchy.

The Fundamental State Laws provided that two parliamentary chambers had to be convened – the State Council (*Gosudarstvennyj Sovet*) or the upper house and the State Duma (*Gosudarstvennaya Duma*) or the lower house. Half of the members of the State Council was appointed by the ruler-emperor, the other half was elected by

[40] Rīga. 1860–1917, pp. 85–87.
[41] Gorodovoe polozhenie [Statute on Towns] (11.06.1892). PSZ, Vol. XII, No. 8708, 1892.
[42] *Švābe, A.* Latvijas vēsture [History of Latvia]. 1800–1914. Uppsala: Daugava, 1958, p. 547.
[43] Rīga. 1860–1917, p. 90.
[44] *Švābe, A.* Latvijas vēsture, p. 547.
[45] Manifest ob usovershenstvovanii gosudarstvennogo poryadka [Manifesto for the Improvement of State Order] (17.10.1905). PSZ, Vol. XXV, No. 26803, 1905.
[46] Osnovnye gosudarstvennye zakony [Fundamental Laws of the State] (23.04.1906). PSZ, Vol. XXVI, No. 27805, 1906.

organisations defined in the law, such as the clergy of the Russian Orthodox Church, Imperial Academy of Sciences, assemblies of nobles, etc. Only the State Duma was genuinely elected but, also in this case, elections of several stages were introduced (except the largest cities in the Russian Empire, including Riga), by taking into account the representation interests of social strata and classes, property qualifications, etc. Electoral rights were restricted. Women, officers in the army and the fleet, nomadic people, etc. had no electoral rights. Thus, the election of the State Duma of the Russian Empire was only conditionally democratic.

The Fundamental State Laws did not comprise the checks-and-balances principle of separation of powers. The Emperor alone had the right to propose revisions to the Fundamental State Laws, to appoint and dismiss the Chairman of the Ministerial Council, ministers and other officials in accordance with law, no law entered into force without the ruler's approval, etc.[47] The dominant position within the political system of the state was highlighted, in particular, the right to dismiss unconditionally the elected members of the State Council and the State Duma.[48] This was clearly demonstrated by Nikolai II, who several times dissolved the State Duma without grounds.[49] Aversion to the right of a single person to dissolve the legislator later proved to be significant in developing the institute of the President of the State in the *Satversme* of the Republic of Latvia.[50] Following major clashes of opinion "for" or "against" the right of the President, elected by the people, to dissolve the *Saeima* (the parliament), with a slight majority of vote in the third reading (67 votes "for", 70 votes "against"[51]), the Constitutional Assembly of the Republic of Latvia determined that "the President of the State shall be elected by the *Saeima* for the term of three years.[52] [and] The President of the State shall have the right to initiate dissolution of the *Saeima*. After this, a national referendum shall be held"[53]. Thus, the historical experience of the Latvian people has, until now, denied it the right to elect the President of the State itself.

According to the calculations made by Ādolfs Šilde, until the collapse of the Russian Empire (1917), more than 10 Latvians had been elected to the convocations of the State Duma. For example, Jānis Čakste[54], Francis Trasuns, Andrejs Priedkalns, et al. On 16 February 1912, A. Priedkalns submitted to the State Duma a project on Latvia's self-government. The self-government of Latvia would comprise the Latvian part of the Governorate of Livonia or Vidzeme, the Governorate of Courland (or the present-day Kurzeme and Zemgale) and the three Latvian districts of the Vitebsk Governorate (or the present-day Latgale). The State Duma dismissed this proposal.[55]

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47 See Art. 8, 9, 17, 44.

48 See Art. 62–63.

49 *Lazdiņš, J.* Konstitucionālisma pirmsākumi un nerealizētie valstiskumi Latvijā [The Origins of Constitutionalism and Unembodied Statehoods in Latvia]. Jurista Vārds, No. 23(774), 2013, p. 7

50 Latvijas Satversmes Sapulces stenogrammas [Transcripts of the Latvian Constitutional Assembly], No. 14, 1921, pp. 1349–1350; No. 15, p. 1371; No. 18; pp. 1707, 1720.

51 Latvijas Satversmes Sapulces stenogrammas [Transcripts of the Latvian Constitutional Assembly], No. 4, 1922, pp. 367, 379.

52 Currently, the *Saeima* elects the President of the State for the term of four years.

53 Latvijas Republikas Satversme [The Constitution of the Republic of Latvia] (15.02.1922). Available: https://likumi.lv/ta/id/57980-latvijas-republikas-satversme [last viewed 15.05.2023].

54 Later, the first President of the State of the Republic of Latvia.

55 *Šilde, Ā.* Pirmā republika. Esejas par Latvijas valsti [First Republic. Essays on the Latvian State]. Rīga: Elpa, 1993, pp. 56–64.

Thus, even before the Republic of Latvia was proclaimed, some Latvians attended the "pre-school of parliamentarism"[56].

Public administration in the Russian Empire was founded on the principle of monarchy rather than the principle of democracy. Therefore, the political system of the Russian Empire, *inter alia*, the electoral rights was not suitable for the nascent Republic of Latvia. However, the same cannot be said about the experience in electoral rights. Experience in undemocratic electoral rights instilled in Latvians the awareness of the need for democratic elections.

3. Consolidation of the principle of democracy in the electoral law of the State of Latvia

The first noteworthy demands for democratic elections of parish, district, governorate officials and convening of All-Russia Constitutional Assembly were heard during the revolution of 1905.[57] However, the revolution was suppressed, and the Russian Empire did not become a democratic state. The political situation within the Russian Empire changed simultaneously with the state's military failures in the fronts of World War I. In 1915–1916, Fēlikss Cielēns and Dr. Pēteris Zālīte drafted two projects of Latvia's autonomy, which, at the same time, could be considered to be the draft constitutions of Latvia's autonomy. Both projects saw Latvia as an autonomous subject within the Russian Empire with very extensive rights of self-governance – its own parliament (the Latvian *Saeima*), government (the Council of Ministers), law, a system of courts adapted to local needs, etc.[58]

It was stated in Article 3 of F. Cielēns' project of Latvia's autonomy that "that the territory of Latvia is united in the local parliament ("Latvian *Saeima*"), based on a unicameral system, elected for the term of two years in the procedure of general, equal, direct, proportional and secret elections. A note. All men and women who have reached the age of 21 have active and passive electoral rights."[59] P. Zālīte's, project, alongside "equal rights" of both genders, envisaged also the equality of nations and beliefs, as well as safeguards for fundamental human rights. In the author's view, special attention should be paid to Article 2 in P. Zālīte's project, which envisaged introduction of the institution of the President, elected by the people: "The President of Latvia shall be elected by all inhabitants of Latvia, who are 25 years old, on the basis of general, direct, secret and equal electoral rights".[60] Thus, P. Zālīte had greater trust in the people than the majority of "the fathers of the *Satversme*", in elaborating the institution of the President in the *Satversme* of the Republic of Latvia.[61]

Leaving aside the procedure for electing the President of the State, it can be concluded that, already before the democratic February Revolution of 1917 in the Russian Empire, the legal thought of the Latvian people was mature enough to embody the principle of democracy in election law, abandoning division of people into classes, social strata, as well as gender inequality.

"Breakout" from the autonomy projects happened after the October Revolution of 1917, when Vladimir Ulyanov (Lenin) and other Bolsheviks came into power.

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[56] Ibid., p. 63.

[57] *Švābe, A.* Latvijas vēsture, pp. 595, 611–612.

[58] *Šilde, Ā.* Latvijas vēsture [History of Latvia]. 1914–1940. Stockholm: Daugava, 1976, pp. 64–69.

[59] Ibid., p. 65.

[60] Ibid., p. 68.

[61] *Lazdiņš, J.* Valsts Prezidenta institūta tapšana Latvijā [Creation of the Institute of the President of the State in Latvia]. Jurista Vārds, No. 46, 13.11.2012, pp. 8–14.

This changed the political situation not only in the former Russia[62] but also in Europe. In November of the same year, the Latvian Provisional National Council (hereafter – LPNC) was established with the aim of uniting Latvians in fight for free Latvia. A historical decision was adopted at the sitting of LPNC on 30 January 1918. Later, Ādolfs Šilde called it the announcement of Latvia's independence, i.e.: LPNC, on the basis of the people's right to self-determination, recognised and proclaimed by all democracies of the world, recognised that Latvia should be an independent democratic republic, uniting Kurzeme, Vidzeme, and Latgale.[63] There was another political force that claimed the honour of proclaiming the Republic of Latvia – the Democratic Block (hereafter – DB). To put an end to disputes between LPNC and DB, a new political force was established – the People's Council.

On 18 November 1918, the People's Council, on the basis of "The Political Platform of the Latvian People's Council" (hereafter – the Political Platform), proclaimed the Republic of Latvia.[64] The fact of establishing the State of Latvia was publicised in the appeal (act of proclamation) "To the Citizens of Latvia!"[65]. "The Political Platform" and the appeal "To the Citizens of Latvia!" turned into the First Provisional *Satversme* of the Republic of Latvia.

Para 1 of Article II of "The Political Platform" provided that Latvia was "Republic on democratic foundations". The same principle, in a slightly different wording, was written also in Article 1 of the appeal (act of proclamation) "To the Citizens of Latvia!":

"Latvia – united within ethnographic borders (Kurzeme, Vidzeme and Latgale) – is a self-standing, independent democratically-republican state".[66]

The principle of democratic republic permeates the constitutional system of the Republic of Latvia till the very present. The successive legal acts also comprise this principle:

1) Article 1 of "Declaration on the State of Latvia" of 27 May 1920 provided that "Latvia is a self-standing and independent republic with a democratic state order";[67]
2) Article 1 of "The *Satversme* of the Republic of Latvia" of 15 February 1922 provides that "Latvia is an independent democratic republic".

This means that the understanding of "a democratic republic" has been set as the foundation of the Latvian political system or that "a democratic republic" should be deemed to be the basic norm of the state political system. Free and equal electoral rights with respect to state and local government offices, in turn, is the foundations of a democracy governed by the rule of law.

Pursuant to the First Provisional *Satversme*, the People's Council proclaimed itself as the first provisional legislator, until convening of the Constitutional Assembly. The People's Council, as the bearer of the supreme state power, appointed the Latvian

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[62] The term "former Russia" is used to denote the Russian Empire and the Republic of Russia, proclaimed on 1 September 1917.

[63] *Šilde, Ā.* Latvijas vēsture, p. 218.

[64] Tautas Padomes Politiskā platforma [The Political Platform of the People's Council] (18.11.1918). Pagaidu Valdības Vēstnesis, No. 1, 14./01.12.1918.

[65] Latvijas pilsoņiem! [To the Citizens of Latvia!] (18.11.1918). Pagaidu Valdības Vēstnesis, No. 1, 14./01.12.1918.

[66] *Lazdiņš, J.* Rechtspolitische Besonderheiten bei der Entstehung des lettischen Staates und seiner Verfassung [Legal-political peculiarities in the formation of the Latvian state and its constitution]. Journal of the University of Latvia. Law, No. 7, 2014, pp. 9–20.

[67] Deklarācija par Latvijas valsti [Declaration on the State of Latvia] (27.05.1920). Valdības Vēstnesis, No. 118. 28.05.1920.

Provisional Government to ensure public administration. The First Provisional *Satversme* did not specify other legal relations between the People's Council and the Provisional Government. Therefore, this regulation evolved in practice as custom. K. Dišlers describes this practice in greater detail in his memoir:

"In practice, the procedure was accepted that the People's Council elected the Prime Minister directly, whereas other ministers were selected and proposed for approval by the Prime Minister. Although nothing is said [in the Political Platform] about the accountability of the provisional government before the People's Council, in practice, this accountability was immediately recognised and applied, thus, already during the first stage in the development of our state order, parliamentarism was established".[68] Thus, during the term of validity of the First Provisional *Satversme*, Latvia started evolving into a state of parliamentary democracy.

In difference to "The Political Platform", "The Provisional Regulation on the Order of the Latvian State", adopted on 1 June 1920[69] already defined clearly the relations between the Constitutional Assembly and the Cabinet of Ministers, on the foundations of parliamentarism:

"The Cabinet of Ministers shall be accountable for its actions before the Constitutional Assembly, and it must step down if it has lost the confidence of the Constitutional Assembly"[70].

"The Political Platform" and "The Provisional Regulation on the Order of the Latvian State" promised also such civic liberties as inviolability of persons and homes, freedoms of the press, speech, assembly and association, etc., as well as extensive cultural rights of foreigners – national minorities and rights to participate in the political life of the State as citizens.[71]

The right, guaranteed in "The Political Platform", to persons of both genders to elect, without differences as to the classes and social strata,[72] Members of the Constitutional Assembly is of historical importance: "Election of the Members of the Constitutional Assembly shall take place by both genders participating on the basis of general, equal, direct, secret and proportional electoral rights"[73]. Thus, "a clear course towards gender equality"[74] was outlined. The same principle of democratic equality was guaranteed also by the subsequent laws and regulations on national and local government elections: "The Provisional Law on the *Satversme* of Latvian Civil Parishes"[75] of 4 December 1918, "Provisional Regulation on the *Satversme*

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[68] *Dišlers, K.* Latvijas Republikas Satversmes attīstība [Development of the Constitution of the Republic of Latvia]. In: Latvijas Republika desmit pastāvēšanas gados [The Republic of Latvia in 10 years]. Rīgā: Grāmatniecības akciju sabiedrība Golts un Jurjans, 1928, pp. 73–74.

[69] "Deklarācija par Latvijas valsti" un "Latvijas valsts iekārtas pagaidu noteikumi" tiek uzskatīti par Latvijas Republikas Otro pagaidu satversmi [The Second Provisional *Satversme* of the Latvia consisted of "Declaration on the State of Latvia" and "Provisional Regulation on the Order of the Latvian State of 1 June 1920]. See *Dišlers, K.* Ievads Latvijas valststiesību zinātnē, p. 85.

[70] Latvijas valsts iekārtas pagaidu noteikumi [Provisional Regulation on the Order of the Latvian State] (01.06.1920). Likumu un valdības rīkojumu krājums, 31.08.1920, No. 4, doc. No. 183, Art. 8.

[71] Politiskā platforma, Art. IV. 1)–3), V. 1)–3); Latvijas valsts iekārtas pagaidu noteikumi, Art. 9.

[72] The term "to elect" also means the right to be elected.

[73] Politiskā platformā, Art. I. 2).

[74] *Zemītis, G.* Drošības aspekti Latvijas vēsturē. No vissenākiem laikiem līdz mūsu dienām [Security Aspects in the History of Latvia. From Ancient Times to Our Days]. Rīga: Latvijas Universitāte, 2023, p. 310.

[75] Latvijas pagastu satversmes pagaidu likums [The Provisional Law on the *Satversme* of Latvian Civil Parishes] (04.12.1918). Latvijas Pagaidu Valdības Likumu un Rihkojumu Krahjums. 15.07.1919, [No.] 1, doc. No. 7, Art. A) 8).

of Latgale Civil Parishes"[76] of 16 July 1919, "Provisional Regulation on Electing Town Councillors"[77]of 18 August 1919, "The Law on Electing the Latvian Constitutional Assembly"[78] , "On Hamlets"[79] of 15 November 1920, law of 1 March 1922 "On Electing the Civil Parish Council"[80] , "Law on the *Saeima* Election"[81] of 9 June 1922, as well as "Law on Electing Civil Parish Councils"[82] of 1 March 1922.

The elections of district councils and boards had a certain particularity because they were not elected directly. "The district council shall consist of 15 to 24 members who are elected by the delegates from the civil parish councils […] from among themselves on the basis of proportional elections […]."[83]

Among the legal acts enumerated above, "Provisional Regulation on the *Satversme* of Latgale Civil Parishes" should be singled out. Until the State of Latvia was proclaimed, in Latgale, as three districts of the Vitebsk Governorate, former Russian law was in force. In this respect, professor Valdis Blūzma's finding that with the coming into force of "Provisional Regulation on the *Satversme* of Latgale Civil Parishes" "the same local government structure as in the rest of Latvia was introduced in Latgale"[84] is essential.

The legal acts of inter-war Latvia set out not only the electoral rights but also restriction on these rights.

The law adopted by the People's Council on 5 December 1919 "Law on Leaving into Force the Former Laws of Russia in Latvia" provided that all former laws of Russia, adopted prior to 24 October 1917, O.S., remained in force, "insofar they have not been revoked by new laws and are not contrary to the Latvian state order and the [Political] Platform of the People's Council".[85] In former Russia, majority was attained at the age of 21. This meant that persons of both genders who have reached the age of 21 should enjoy electoral rights.

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[76] Latgales pagastu satversmes pagaidu noteikumi [Provisional Regulation on the *Satversme* of Latgale Civil Parishes] (16.07.1919). Papildinājums pie Likumu un Waldibas Rihkojumu Krahjuma. Rīgā: Teesleetu ministrijas kodifikazijas isdevums, 1921, doc. No. 66, Art. A. 8.

[77] Pagaidu noteikumi par pilsētu domnieku vēlēšanām [Provisional Regulation on Electing Town Councillors] (18.08.1919). Latvijas Pagaidu Valdības Likumu un Rihkojumu Krahjums. 27.10.1919. 27, [No.] 10, doc. No. 125, Art. 1.

[78] Latvijas Satversmes Sapulces vēlēšanu likums [The Law on Electing the Latvian Constitutional Assembly] (19.08.1919). Latvijas Pagaidu Valdības Likumu un Rihkojumu Krahjums. 27.09.1919, [No. 9], doc. No. 124, Art. 2.

[79] Par miestiem [On Hamlets] (15.11.1920). Likumu un waldības rihkojumu krahjums, 29.12.1920, No. 14, doc. No. 243.

[80] Par pagasta padomes vēlēšanām [On Electing the Civil Parish Council] (01.03.1920). Likumu un valdības rīkojumu krājums, 22.03.1922, No. 4, doc. No. 57.

[81] Likums par Saeimas vēlēšanām [Law on the *Saeima* Election] (09.06.1922). Valdības Vēstnesis, No. 141, 30.06.1922,

[82] Likumu par pagasta padomes vēlēšanām [Law on Electing the Civil Parish Council] (01.03.1922). Likumu un valdības rīkojumu krājums, No. 4, 22.03.1922, doc. No. 57.

[83] Latgales pagastu satversmes pagaidu noteikumus, Art. 81; Pagaidu noteikumi par apriņķu padomēm un valdēm [Provisional Regulation on District Councils and Boards] (20.09.1919). Papildinājums pie Likumu un Waldibas Rihkojumu Krahjuma. Rīgā: Teesleetu ministrijas kodifikazijas isdevums, 1921, doc. No. 14, Art. 49.

[84] *Blūzma, V.* Latvijas Republikas valsts dibināšana un nacionālās tiesību sistēmas veidošana [Establishment of the State of the Republic of Latvia and Development of the National Legal System] (1918–1922). In: Latvijas tiesību vēsture [History of Latvian law] (1914–1922). Rīga: Fonds Latvijas Vēsture, 2000, p. 184.

[85] Likums par agrāko Krievijas likumu spēkā atstāšanu Latvijā [Law on Leaving the Former Laws of Russian in Force in Latvia] (05.12.1919). Likumu un valdības rīkojumu krājums, 1919, No. 13, doc. No. 154.

At the time when the first law of the Republic of Latvia on local governments – "The Provisional Law on the *Satversme* of Latvian Civil Parishes" – was discussed at the People's Council, opinion clashed regarding the age as of which citizens should be granted the electoral rights. For example, Jānis Eikerts appealed "not to turn left", i.e., to not follow the example of the Soviet Russia by granting the electoral right from the age of 18, as nothing good had come of it, but rather "to turn right", i.e., to recognise the right to vote from the age of 21 and the right to be elected as an official from the age of 25.[86] The majority of members in the People's Council voted for granting the electoral rights from the age of 20 as this practice already had evolved in several Latvian cities.[87] In difference to "The Provisional Law on the *Satversme* of Latvian Civil Parishes", "Provisional Regulation on the *Satversme* of Latgale Civil Parishes" retained the majority age of former Russia.[88] Discussions about the age, from which the electoral rights should be granted, continued while other election laws were drafted. The exchange of opinions led to the conclusion that electoral rights should be granted to citizens of both genders from the age of 21.[89] Thus, in this matter, return to the former Russian law was seen. To eliminate contradictions within the legal system, "Law on Electing the Civil Parish Council" of 1 March 1922 provided for electoral rights from the age of 21 also in civil parishes.[90] However, one exception had to be made.

Men from the age of 18 were conscripted into the Latvian army and many of them had participated in the freedom fights for the State of Latvia. It would be unfair if these men were denied the right to elect representatives to the Constitutional Assembly. Therefore, on 15 March 1920, "Additions to the Law on Electing the Latvian Constitutional Assembly" were introduced, providing that "[a]ll soldiers, who are in active service and who, by 1 March 1920, have become eighteen years old, shall enjoy the electoral rights with respect to the Latvian Constitutional Assembly".[91]

A person who, in the procedure set out in law, had been recognised as being feeble-minded (mentally ill), insane, deaf-and-dumb, as well as other persons placed under guardianship did not enjoy the right to vote.[92] Among the restrictions on electoral rights, the severity, in which the legislator had turned against a person who had lost the electoral rights on the basis of a court's judgement in a criminal case, is surprising. Depending on the seriousness of the crime, such a person could be denied the right to vote for 3 to 10 years after serving the sentence.[93] The legislator's severity could be

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86 Latvijas Tautas Padome. I puse [stenogrammas] [The People's Council of Latvia. I Half [transcripts]]. Rīga: Satversmes Sapulces izdevums, 1920, pp. 34–41.

87 Ibid., pp. 173–174. See also Latvijas pagastu satversmes pagaidu likuma, II. A) 8).

88 Latgales pagastu satversmes pagaidu noteikumi, A. 8.

89 See, for example, discussions on city council elections. Latvijas Tautas Padome [stenogrammas]. I puse, pp. 172–183.

90 Likums par pagasta padomes vēlēšanām, Art. 3.

91 Latvijas Tautas Padome. II puse [The People's Council of Latvia. II Half]. Rīga: Satversmes Sapulces izdevums, 1920, pp. 887–888; Papildinājumi pie Satversmes Sapulces vēlēšanu likuma [Additions to the Law on Electing the Latvian Constitutional Assembly]. Likumu un valdības rīkojumu krājums, 30.04.1920, No. 2, doc. No. 178.

92 Latvijas pagastu satversmes pagaidu likums, Art. A) 8); Latgales pagastu satversmes pagaidu noteikumi, Art. A. 8; Likums par pagasta padomes vēlēšanām, Art. 4; Pagaidu noteikumi par pilsētu domnieku vēlēšanām, Art. 2; Latvijas Satversmes Sapulces vēlēšanu likums, Art. 2; Likums par Saeimas vēlēšanām, Art. 2, etc.

93 Latvijas pagastu satversmes pagaidu likums, Art. A) 8); Latgales pagastu satversmes pagaidu noteikumi, Art. A. 8; Pagaidu noteikumi par pilsētu domnieku vēlēšanām, Art. 2–3; Latvijas Satversmes Sapulces vēlēšanu likums, Art. 3; Likums par Saeimas vēlēšanām, Art. 3, etc.

explained by the historical experience. Similar restrictions had been set with respect to electing the State Duma of the Russian Empire.[94]

On 29 June 1920, the Constitutional Assembly passed the law "On Closing Noble Corporations".[95] The property of the Knighthood Corporations of Vidzeme, Courland and Piltene was transferred into the State's ownership. The Cabinet Regulation "On Closing the Noble Orphan Courts", issued on 16 November1920"[96] and the law of 10 March 1922 "On Liquidation of the Credit Union of Vidzeme Nobles and Liquidation of Kurzeme Credit Society"[97] followed. With the coming into force of these laws, the division of people into classes was abolished in full.

Summary

Embodying the principle of democracy in the electoral law of the Latvian people begad after the abolition of serfdom in the Baltic Governorates of the Russian Empire at the beginning of the 19th century. A Latvian, as a member of the civil parish community, acquired the right to elected and to be elected an official of the civil parish. Although the 19th century laws on peasants included restrictions on democratic electoral rights, in the spirit of the time, the civil parish society was democratically organised. Participation in organisation of the civil parish life, based on the outcome of elections of the officials, for the majority of the Latvian people became the sole "school of statehood" until the proclamation of the Republic of Latvia.

Until the collapse of the Russian Empire, Latvians amassed experience in electoral rights also in the elections of city councils and the State Duma. Viewed from the contemporary perspective, none of the elections held in the Russian Empire could be deemed to be democratic, because law-based inequality of ranks, social strata and genders existed. The election law on cities was particularly undemocratic in this respect. However, even undemocratic elections gave election experience and awareness of the need for democratic elections.

The demand for democratic elections was advanced already at the very beginning of the 20th century. This shows that, even prior to the democratic February Revolution of 1917 in the Russian Empire, the Latvian people were mature enough to embody in the election law the principle of democracy, complying with the civil society. The First Provisional *Satversme* of the Republic of Latvia, as well as subsequent laws on election the parliament of the state and on the local government elections documented the will of the Latvian people to live in a parliamentary republic with an election system, compliant with democracy, abolishing the division of people into ranks, social strata, as well as gender inequality.

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[94] See Polozhenie o vyborah" v" Gosudarstvennuyu Dumu [Regulation on Elections of the State Duma]. Polnyj svod" zakonov Rossijkoj imperii. V" 2-h" knigah". Kniga 1. Tomy. S.-Peterburg": izdanie knizhnogo magazina \"Zakonovedenie\", Art. 10, 1911.

[95] Par muižnieku korporāciju slēgšanu [On Closing Noble Corporations] (29.06.1920). Likumu un valdības rīkojumu krājums, 31.08.1920, No. 4, doc. No. 187.

[96] Par muižnieku bāriņu tiesu slēgšanu [On Closing Noble Orphan Courts] (16.11.1920). Likumu un valdības rīkojumu krājums, 29.12.1920, No. 14, doc. No. 248.

[97] Par Vidzemes muižnieku kredītsavienības un Kurzemes kredītbiedrības likvidāciju [On Liquidation of the Credit Union of Vidzeme Nobles and Kurzeme Credit Society] (10.03.1922). Likumu un valdības rīkojumu krājums, 22.03.1922, No. 4, doc. No. 61.

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