

Architecture and interior of the Saeima buildings

The buildings of the Republic of Latvia parliament (Saeima) are located in the north-west part of the Old Riga, in the block adjacent to Jēkaba iela. Torņa, Aldaru, Mazā Trokšņu, and Klostera ielas form the borders of the block.



Decorative posts and chains of the fence next to the Saeima building

The main building of the Saeima

The main building of the Saeima is located at 11 Jēkaba iela. It contains the Plenary Chamber and offices of the Speaker of the Saeima, other officials, and staff members of the Saeima Chancellery. The building is notable for a number of magnificent and historical rooms that are used for receiving visitors, meetings of MPs, press conferences, and other activities.

The main Saeima building was constructed according to the design by Robert Pflug, a Baltic-German architect, and Jānis Baumanis, the first Latvian architect with an academic background, in the period from 1863 to 1867 for the needs of the Livonian Knighthood.

Over more than its hundred-year existence, the building has been reconstructed several times. After it was maliciously set on fire in 1921 and its interior, including the Plenary Chamber, burned down completely, the building was restored. The demolished parts and the Plenary Chamber were restored according to the design of architect Eižens Laube, adapting the premises to the needs of the parliament of the Republic of Latvia.

The façade, as well as the lanterns, the decorative fence posts and chains are distinctive features of Eclecticism. Sculptured lion heads, symbolising the king of the beasts, decorate the balconies and cornices, and they also anchor the fence chains.

The **Plenary Chamber**, in which Saeima sittings are held, acquired its current appearance as an amphitheatre at the end of the 1990s according to the design by architect Andris Veidemanis, who drew inspiration from the interior design created by Eižens Laube in 1922. At present it looks almost as it did during the First Latvian Republic. Dark brown panels cover the walls. The coat of arms of the Republic of Latvia above the seat of the Presidium is made of oak. The ceiling ornaments have remained the same – they feature antique ornaments combined with the popular Latvian motifs of the sun and oak leaves. The Chamber is divided into two parts – seating for the members of parliament and a visitors' gallery.

Next to the Plenary Chamber is the **Voting Room**, which was created in the beginning of the 1980s by walling up one of the inner courtyards. MPs use the Voting Room to elect state officials by secret ballot and to give interviews.

The **Yellow Room** is a room that was commonly considered a lobby during the First Republic. In this room MPs give interviews and meet with guests and visitors to the Saeima. The décor of the room is in the style of Louis XVI, with its characteristic rose motif, and the eclectic-style furniture, which has been preserved from the era of the Knighthood.

The **Guest Room** is another function room of the Saeima. It contains the allegorical paintings of the 19th-century French painter Auguste Debay.



White Room

During official visits, the Speaker of the Saeima and Deputy Speakers welcome foreign ambassadors and guests in the **White Room**. Ceremonial events and press conferences are held there as well. The most striking part of the Neo-Rococo-style interior is the mirrors, which are decorated with rocaille motifs.

The Speaker of the Saeima and Deputy Speakers meet with foreign visitors in the Brown Room. The Neo-Rococo

style dominates the room's décor and the suite of furniture. A painting by Vilhelms Purvītis decorates the room. The Green Room is also used for receiving foreign officials.

Originally, the Red Room was one of the most impressive rooms in the Neo-Gothic style. Ludis Bērziņš designed



Red Room

the stained-glass windows, and architect Aleksandrs Birzenieks designed the ceiling decorations in the 1950s. The room contains a large ethnographic candelabrum crowned with the coats-of-arms of Latvia's 19 historical districts.

The Saeima buildings at Torņa iela and Jēkaba iela

Across the street from the main Saeima building is a complex of three Saeima-related buildings at 3/5 Torņa iela, 16 Jēkaba iela and 10/12 Jēkaba iela.

The building at **3/5 Torņa iela** houses rooms of Saeima parliamentary groups and committees, offices of MPs, part of the Saeima Library, and a chapel.

As the address indicates, this building consists of two structures. The house at 3 Torņa iela replaced the former



Ceiling paintings of late 18th and early 19th century

Jēkaba gate in the defensive wall surrounding the old town and was built in 1704 as a typical residential house. The building at 5 Torņa iela was constructed in 1685.

During the course of centuries, these buildings have been renovated many times. Their façades have the architectural decorations that are characteristic of Classicism. From

1928 to 1945, these buildings housed the Jānis Misiņš Library, which is one of the largest national book collections.

The latest reconstruction of the buildings took place from 1999 to 2001 according to the design of architect Artūrs Lapiņš. During the course of reconstruction, a number of



Saeima building at 16 Jēkaba iela

unique wall paintings dating back to 18th and 19th century were uncovered in several rooms; a fragment of ancient Riga's defensive wall was uncovered in the basement.

A chapel has been set up on the first floor. The altar was formed according to the design of architect Martin Samm. The crucifix, sculpted by Jānis Bārda, is a gift to the Saeima.

The building at **16 Jēkaba iela** houses the offices of Saeima parliamentary groups, committees, and MPs, as well as the Visitor and Information Centre.

The façade of the building was formed in the 1960s. It reveals both the horizontal window lintels which are characteristic of Classicism, and the typically Baroque portals. A mansard storey was reconstructed at the end of the 1920s. The interior of the building successfully combines elements of various styles: plaster ornaments, old-fashioned arches and metal decorations.

The building at **10/12 Jēkaba iela**, called the Committee House, houses the Saeima committee rooms, as well as the offices of MPs and Saeima employees.

The building complex at 10/12 Jēkaba iela is connected to the building at 2 Mazā Trokšņu iela, which was originally built for the needs of the Livonian Knighthood. The building gained its current size in 1912, when a new structure was added. The building's façade facing Jēkaba iela is decorated with plaster ornaments of Neo-Baroque, Neo-Rococo, and Neo-Classical styles.

Tours of the Saeima

Anyone who is interested may visit the main Saeima building in order to learn more about the everyday work of the parliament, to see its unique architecture and interiors, as well as to learn about its history. In order to visit the main Saeima building, one should sign up by telephoning 67087353 or by sending an e-mail at ekskursijas@saeima.lv.