

LATVIA REVIEW

IV. Other institutional issues related to checks and balances

A. The process for preparing and enacting laws

Framework, policy and use of impact assessments and evidence based policy-making, stakeholders'/public consultations (including consultation of judiciary and other relevant stakeholders on judicial reforms), and transparency and quality of the legislative process both in the preparatory and the parliamentary phase.

In 2023, several Special Procedure mandate holders¹ continued dialogue with the Latvian Government regarding a bill that would require that all pre-school and school institutions, including those operating in minority-language or bilingual institutions, transition to Latvian-language instruction. The mandate-holders raised concerns that this bill severely limits education in the minority languages of Latvia and would likely lead to a breach of Latvia's international obligations under a number of human rights instruments. Further concerns were raised that the amendments were developed without effective and meaningful participation of the affected minorities (see OHCHR contribution regarding Latvia in 2023 and a [press release](#) by Special Procedures).

D. The enabling framework for civil society

Rules and practices having an impact on the effective operation and safety of civil society organisations and human rights defenders. This includes measures for protection from attacks – verbal, physical or online – intimidation, legal threats incl. SLAPPs, negative narratives or smear campaigns, measures capable of affecting the public perception of civil society organisations, etc. It also includes measures to monitor threats or attacks and dedicated support services.

In March 2022, several UN Special Procedure mandate-holders entered into a dialogue with the Latvian Government regarding the alleged undue use of criminal proceedings against human rights defenders Ieva Raubiško and Egils Grasmanis. Ms. Ieva Raubiško and Mr. Egils Grasmanis were human rights defenders and members of I Want to Help Refugees (Gribu palīdzēt bēgļiem - GPB), an association that offers practical and immediate support, including assistance with integration, to refugees and asylum seekers in Latvia. The mandate holders expressed their serious concern as to the opening of the criminal investigation against Ms. Raubiško and Mr. Grasmanis, which might have been initiated in direct response to their legitimate acts of solidarity with asylum seekers, undertaken with the sole aim of seeking to prevent human rights violations. They also underlined their serious concern as to the continuing state of emergency in the border region with Belarus, in particular in relation to its violation of human rights – most prominently the human rights of migrants and the right to seek asylum as well as its impact on human rights defenders seeking to monitor the human rights situation in

¹ Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues; Special Rapporteur on the right to education, Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights

the affected areas. The mandate holders asked for information as to the justification for the opening of the criminal investigation against Ms. Raubiško and Mr. Grasmanis and the status of the investigation. They also requested information about the state of emergency's impact on human rights defenders, particularly those working for the rights of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers, as well as journalists seeking to report on the situation in the border region ([AL LVA 1/2023](#)).