

## **Latvian parliament passes bill requiring Orthodox hierarchs to be citizens, have 10 years of residency**



The Latvian Seima passed a bill requiring Orthodox hierarchs to be Latvian citizens and to have lived in the country for at least ten years yesterday.

Two readings were held, with 79 deputies in favor and none against. There were no debates, objections, or proposals, reports [Sputnik-Latvia](#), with reference to the [parliamentary website](#).

The measure was adopted “urgently,” at the request of the Seima’s Commission on Human Rights and Public Affairs that proposed the measure earlier this week, noting that the criteria would apply to officials of religious organizations whose leadership is located outside of Latvia, with specific mention of the Latvian Orthodox Church, an autonomous body within the Russian Orthodox Church.

The relevant amendments have been made to the law on the Latvian Orthodox Church, stipulating that only a citizen of Latvia who has been permanently residing in the country for at least ten years can become a hierarch of any rank in the Church. The current primate, His Eminence Metropolitan Alexander of Riga was born in Latvia and holds Latvian citizenship.

The Commission representatives believe the law will strengthen state and public security in Latvia, where Orthodoxy is the largest religion, claiming 26% of the population. However, the parliament's legal department, which checks bills for compliance with other norms, gave a negative response to these amendments, noting that they contradict the international provisions on religious freedom and autonomy of Church institutions. The department therefore advised not to pass the amendments.

Latvia already has an agreement with the Vatican that only citizens can become bishops of the Latvian Catholic church.

Religious scholar Roman Lunkin has suggested that the Orthodox community can appeal the new residency requirement.

- Source: [OrthoChristian](#)