

View into The History of Municipalities

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The local government of Riga – called town council, city council or otherwise – since the most ancient times has been a relatively independent institution with long-standing traditions, and a significant role in it always has been played by its leader. Over the centuries the local government of Riga has mostly been led by strong personalities with strategic and constructive thinking.

Riga Town Council 13-20th centuries



The heads of Riga, representing the town inhabitants, were mentioned in documents already in 1210. It is unknown when the first town council was formed, but the members of the town council took part in signing treaties in Riga in 1225.

In the 13th century the town council governed the town and acted as legislature, but in the 14th century – also as a judicial authority. At the same time the town council managed the town protection problems, imposed taxes, represented the interests of Riga's inhabitants in foreign affairs, signed agreements and appointed ambassadors. However, a communal assembly of Riga inhabitants preserved a great role in settling important and extraordinary problems. In the first half of the 13th century the councilmen of the town council were elected for one year, but at the end of the century already the town council itself selected successors to councilmen posts. The post of councilman position actually became a lifelong post.

The rights of the town council were restricted after Riga became subordinate to the King of Poland and Lithuania, Stefan Batory (1581).

Disagreements between the Riga Town Council and guilds about the right of governing the town became aggravated at the end of the 16th century. It reached its culmination during the so-called "Calendar Unrests" (1584-1589), though the town council maintained its dominance. Discordance flared up again in the first half of the 17th century when guilds managed to gain support from Sweden. At that time Riga was governed by Sweden.

After Riga fell into the jurisdiction of Russia (1710), it became a province center, and after the reforms of 1783, Riga's local administration was governed by a governor-general. However, the town council, representing the interests of the German nobility, tried to preserve its influence in Riga. With alternating success it managed to do so by 1889. An administrative town reform took place in Russia in 1870, reaching also Riga in 1877.

The City Council and the City Board were formed, and the City Mayor was elected. During the Independent Republic of Latvia (1918-1940) Riga was officially recognized as the capital of Latvia (1931), with the Riga City Council governing it. After the governmental overturn of 1934, the Cabinet of Ministers became the head of the city.

After the Soviet occupation in 1940, administrative structure of Riga was reorganized. A provisional Executive Committee was formed. In 1941 the city was divided into six districts to facilitate police surveillance and management of nationalized properties. Such a system was preserved also after World War II; from time to time the number of districts and borderlines has changed. The Deputy Council of Working People (from 1977 – People's Deputy Council) governed Riga. It was elected once in two years (from 1979 – in 2.5). The Council elected the Executive Committee. In reality these procedures were formal, and the city administration realized decisions inspired by the totalitarian regime's leading organs.



On 4 May 1990 the Supreme Council of the Latvia SSR adopted the Declaration on Restoring Independence of the Republic of Latvia, which introduced the period of rebuilding the structure of state power and administration in Latvia, including the Riga City administration reform.

The process of restructuring started on 15 February 1990 with the laws adopted by the Supreme Council on the local governments of rural municipalities, regions, towns and cities. Pursuant to these laws the People's Deputy Council from its members elected the Chairman of the Council, the Deputy Chairman and his/her secretary.

Andris Teikmanis, representative from the Latvian Popular Front, was elected the Chairman of the People's Deputy Council of Riga. It should be noted that under the guidance of A. Teikmanis, the People's Deputy Council of Riga voted for using the historical coat of arms and banner of Riga - a symbolic contribution to the continuity of the city's heritage.

Simultaneously, major changes took place in the city life and in the work of the municipal structural units linked with the changes in property forms and in the formation of the city budget.

The law "On the Local Government of the Capital City Riga" passed on June 10, 1992 changed the city administration system in the very core. The Riga City Council, consisting of 60 councillors, became the largest administrative body of the city. 30 out of the 60 councillors were elected by the People's Deputy Council of Riga from its members and the other 30 were elected by the Councils of the Riga City districts; five councillors from each district. Presidium and Executive Committee of the People's Deputy Council of Riga were abolished and replaced by the City Board consisting of 11 members. Andris Teikmanis was elected Chairman of the Riga City Council. The district boards were established instead of executive committees, which were lead by the executive directors of the districts.

On August 26, 1993 the Riga City Council passed a resolution "On the Reform of the Riga Local Government". It suggested to the Parliament to create in Riga a one-level local government with one administrative body, i.e. Riga City Council with 60 councillors and the executive body under the Riga City Council – the Riga City Board. On May 19, 1994 the Saeima passed the law following which the Riga City Council was elected in the municipal elections of May 29, 1994.



Heads of the City

At different times, under different powers, with different methods, the Heads of the city of Riga have tried to defend the interests of the people of Riga as much as possible and to ensure the growth of the city.

Since 1901, the Riga City Council has started the tradition of creating a gallery of portraits of the Heads of the City, it was renovated in 1994.

Since the founding of the Riga City Council in 1878 until the First World War, Roberts von Bingners (1878-1885), Augusts von Etingens (1886-1889), Ludwigs Kerkoviuss, Georgs Armitstead sand Wilhelms von Bulmerinks took the positions of the Heads of the city.



Mārtiņš Staķis
1979

Chairman of the Riga City Council
Oktober 2, 2020



Oļegs Burovs
1960

Chairman of the Riga City Council
August 19, 2019 - February 24, 2020



Dainis Turlais
1950

Chairman of the Riga City Council
May 30, 2019 - June 20, 2019



Nils Ušakovs
1976

Chairman of the Riga City Council
June 20, 2017 - May 30, 2019



Nils Ušakovs
1976

Chairman of the Riga City Council
June 20, 2013 - June 22, 2017



Nils Ušakovs
1976

Chairman of the Riga City Council
July 1, 2009 - June 20, 2013



Jānis Birks
1956

Chairman of the Riga City Council
February 19, 2007 - July 1, 2009



Aivars Aksenoks
1961

Chairman of the Riga City Council
March 29, 2005 - February 19, 2007



Gundars Bojārs
1967

Chairman of the Riga City Council
2001-2005



Andris Ārgalis
1944

Chairman of the Riga City Council
2000-2001



Andris Bērziņš
1951

Chairman of the Riga City Council
1997-2000

Historian, teacher, politician. Prior to working in the Riga City Council, he worked in the Ministry of Economics and was the Minister of Welfare. During his career, he managed to arrange and stabilize the budget of Riga. Much attention was paid to education and improvement of materially technical base of the schools. Construction of the House of the Blackheads and the Town Hall Square were completed. In 2000, A. Bērziņš became the Prime Minister.



Māris Purgailis
1947

Chairman of the Riga City Council 1994-1997

Scientist, specialist of cybernetics. During his time, the structure of the Riga City Council was changed, preparations for the city's 800th anniversary were started, which also included the beginning of the renovation of the Town Hall Square and the construction of the House of the Blackheads. The city tax collection system was arranged.



Andris Teikmanis
1959

Chairman of the Council of People's Deputies of the Riga City , Chairman of the Riga City Council 1990-1994

Lawyer. At the beginning of the Awakening, he participated in the Latvian People's Front, was elected to the Supreme Council of Latvian SSR and on May 4, 1990, voted for Latvia's independence. During his time, the city underwent complex processes in the transition to a market economy, privatisation of city companies, identification of city properties, and working out a city development plan.



Andrejs Inkulis
1941

Chairman of the Council of People's Deputies Executive Committee of the Riga City
1990-1992



Alfrēds Rubiks
1935

Chairman of the Council of People's Deputies Executive Committee of the Riga City
1984-1990

Communist, soviet nomenclature worker. He started his career as a secretary of the Communist Youth, an employee of the Latvian Communistic Party Central Committee, from 1982-1984 the Minister of Local Industry. During his time, large-scale construction of new residential blocks was carried out in Purvciems, Pļavnieki, Mezciems, Zolitude, Ziepniekkalns. The idea arose to install a metro in Riga, which was actively opposed by the participants of the awakening movement. In 1985 he became a member of the LCP Central Committee, later the first secretary - in fact the highest official in Soviet Latvia. After the August 1991 coup, he was arrested as the chairman of the Latvian State Emergency Committee, in 1995 he was sentenced to 8 years in prison for attempting to overthrow the state power, and in 1997 he had early exemption.



Mečislavs Dubra
1934 - 2003

Chairman of the Council of People's Deputies Executive Committee of the Riga City
1976-1984



Gunārs Ziemelis
1931-1978

Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Riga City Workers 'Deputies' Council
1969-1976



Egons Slēde
1929 - 2001

Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Riga City Workers 'Deputies' Council
1967-1969



Jānis Pakalns
1912 - 2002

Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Riga City Workers 'Deputies' Council
1962-1967



Ēriks Baumanis
1923-1980

Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Riga City Workers 'Deputies' Council
1958-1962



Vilhelms Lecis
1898-1977

Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Riga City Workers 'Deputies' Council
1952-1957



Edgars Apinis
1902-1952

Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Riga City Workers 'Deputies' Council
1951-1952



Hugo Vitroks
1873-1958

Riga City Commissioner Ober Burgomaster
1941-1944



Arnolds Deglavs
1904-1969

Chairman of the Riga City Temporary Executive Committee,
Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Riga City Workers 'Deputies' Council
1940-1941; 1944-1951



Ādolfs Ermsons
1900-1978

The Oldest of Riga 1940



Jānis Pupurs
1901-1977

The Oldest of Riga 1940



Roberts Liepiņš
1890-1978

The Head of the City of Riga, The Oldest of Riga 1936-1940

Public figure, politician. Before the work in the Riga City Council, he worked at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. During his time, major reorganizations were made in the Riga - a new power plant was built, public transport was improved, and the Dome Square was created. Several schools have also been built, as well as the annex of the Riga Latvian Society building.



Roberts Garselis
1892-1936

The Head of the City of Riga
1935-1936



Hugo Celmiņš
1877-1941

The Head of the City of Riga 1931-1935

Politician, before working in Riga City Council, he was member of the Constitutional Assembly, Minister of Agriculture, Education and Foreign Affairs, in the 1924-1925. - Prime Minister. While he was the Head of the city, the Freedom Monument was built and the Brothers' Cemetery was built, also several schools, edge of the Daugava was landscaped. After the coup of 1934, H. Celmiņš, as a convinced Democrat, stood in opposition to K. Ulmanis and thus could not continue working in the Riga City Council. He continued his diplomatic career. After the Soviet occupation in 1940, H. Celmiņš participated in compiling the list of candidates for the Democratic Bloc, which was a desperate attempt by Latvian patriots to resist the legalization of the occupation. The Soviet government arrested most of the participants of this campaign, including Hugo Celmiņš. He was sentenced to the highest sentence and shot on July 30, 1941, in Lefortov Prison, Moscow.



Ādams Krieviņš
1889-1951

The Head of the City of Riga 1928-1931



Alfrēds Andersons
1879-1937

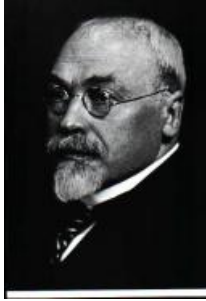
The Head of the City of Riga 1921-1928

Civil engineer, writer, teacher, educator. During his time, most attention was paid to the elimination of the damage of war and the social development of the city. A tuberculosis sanatorium was built in Biķernieki, several primary schools, saunas (mainly in the workers' districts - Bolderāja, Čiekurkalns, Ilģuciems, Vecmīlgrāvis), as well as a block house on Ausekļa Street 3 - a modern residential house with a kindergarten and library. During the time of A. Anderson, the Central Market was also built. At the same time, A. Anderson also paid a lot of attention to the development of culture, during his time the Brass Library was established.



Andrejs
Frīdenbergs
1875-1941

The Head of the City of Riga 1920-1921



Gustavs Zemgals
1871-1939

The Head of the City of Riga 1917, 1918, 1919-1920

Lawyer, public figure, politician, one of the participants of the proclamation of the Republic of Latvia. His activities in the Riga City Council and in the position of the head of the city coincided with the dramatic events in Latvia - the First World War, the German and Soviet occupation, the Bermontiad. After these events, the economy of Riga was destroyed, many buildings were demolished, and unemployment and starvation prevailed. G. Zemgls, as the first head of the Riga City Council during independent Latvia, had to fight with these problems. In 1920, G. Zemgals was elected a member of the Constitutional Assembly and thus he stopped working in the Riga City Council. From 1927 to 1931, G. Zemgals was the President of the Republic of Latvia.

Sīmanis Bergīis
1887-1943

Chairman of the Riga Council of Workers' Deputies 1919

Rūdolfis Endrupis
1878-1938

Chairman of the Riga Council of Workers' Deputies 1919

Voldemārs Pusulis
1883-1939

Head of Riga City Administration 1919

Pauls Hopfs
1917-1918

Chief of the City of Riga 1917-1918



Vilhelms Roberts
fon Bulmerinks
1862-1953

The Head of the City of Riga
1913-1917

Nobleman. He continued the implementation of the Riga Development Plan started by Armitstead. During his time, the devastating years of the First World War fell on Riga. At the beginning of the war, Bulmerinks took care of food reserves and fuel supply for the inhabitants of Riga. He was deported to Irkutsk in 1915 for refusing to comply with the order of the general of the Russian army to dismantle the monument to Peter I, but formally continued to be the mayor of the city because no new one was elected. Later Bulmerinks returned to Riga.



Džordžs Armitsteds
1847-1912

The Head of the City of Riga 1901-1912

Engineer, businessman. During his leadership, rapid construction continued, with special attention to social needs. The education system was improved, 16 new schools were built, the administrative building of the 1st City Hospital was built, ambulance station was set up in Jacob's Barracks and a night shelter for the homeless in the suburbs of Maskavas district. Armitsted together with his brother Edgars and mother Karolina, also donated a significant amount for the construction of a bone tuberculosis hospital in Jūrmala. Unfortunately, the realization of this idea was interrupted by the war. At the same time, a lot of attention was paid to the improvement and modernization of the city - Baltezers water pumping station, power plant in Andrejsala, Riga 2nd theatre building, Riga City Art Museum building, zoo was opened, electric tram lines expanded. Armitsted has been recognized by the people of Riga as one of the most outstanding mayors of Riga.

Ludvigs Vilhelms
Kerkoviuss
1831-1904

The Head of the City of Riga 1890-1901

Merchant. The time of Kerkovius was marked by a rapid industrial boom, population growth and its resulting construction boom. During his time and with his support, the thoughtful construction of the Boulevard Circle and the creation of parks took place, many public buildings were built, and a lot was done in the improvement of Riga. In 1901, Kerkoviuss made a will, bequeathing 26 paintings from his painting collection to the city of Riga. This wish was fulfilled by his brother Theodor Wilhelm Kerkovius. On September 6, 1904, the city of Riga gratefully accepted these works of art. And later they enriched the fund of the newly built Riga Art Museum.

*Literature:

Administration of Riga in eight centuries. – R., 2000

Gallery of portraits of Riga municipal leaders. – R., 2001