

EPF Fact Sheet n°7

MANA BALSS



In 2011, at a time when the democracy in Latvia was described as dubious by many and the country largely run by the interests of a handful of tycoons, a couple of young people established the website MANABALSS.LV, an online platform which gives Latvia's people the opportunity to influence the national law making process by suggesting new policy ideas and presenting them to the Parliament.

The project ManaBalss.lv (My Voice in Latvian) gathered a lot of interest and a new government resulted in a political decision to promise that all proposals on ManaBalss.lv would be treated by the Parliament if the proposal had received 10.000 signatures on the initiative platform.

Today around 70 % of the Latvian population of 2 million people has looked at the website and from them almost 200 000 have cast their votes for proposals on the website. More than 34 proposals have reached the minimum of votes to be transferred to the Parliament or, in some cases, to the local municipality, for which the number of signatures can differ but is usually less than for Parliament.

The platform ManaBalss.lv has had few initiatives that did not even need to reach the necessary amount of signatures to be looked through and approved by Parliament. Some of the initiatives that have gotten a lot of attention in the media and made some positive changes in the society are ***For the Preservation of Micro-Enterprises, For Women's Rigts to Decide about her Body, For 2% of GDP for Defence.***

Anybody who wishes to bring up a subject has to submit it to ManaBalss.lv where their team will help with formulating proposals so they do not go against democracy and its values, respect for others, freedom, equality, human rights and the rule of law.

In some cases, the essence of the citizens' proposals has been fully or partially agreed by the Parliament. However, in most cases the Parliament has not agreed to the proposal since it has not been possible to find an account for this.

Among the initiatives for municipalities proposed by the citizens are on subjects like ***Route for a Bus, Help for Wild Birds.*** Among the cases in the national level are ***Payment only for the Consumed Electricity, Pension without Tax, Free Catering in the Kindergarden or Bi-Annual Testing of Cars or Reduced VAT Rates for Food, The Possibility to get Compensation for Returning Bottles and Other Drink Packaging.***