

## **The Archives of the Riigikogu 1995-2011**

The year 2011 is very significant to the people of Estonia. This summer we celebrated the twentieth anniversary of the regaining of independence. On August 20, 1991 the Supreme Council of Estonia passed the resolution on national independence, reconstituting the pre-1940 state.

The following presentation gives an overview of the development of the archives of the Estonian Parliament – the Riigikogu – in the period following the restoration of independence.

### **Preservation of Riigikogu documents in State Archives 1921□1940**

In the period 1920□1940, Toompea Castle in Tallinn was the seat of both the Parliament and the Government of Estonia. Both the Parliament's and the Government's documents were kept in the State Archives, which was established under the subordination of the State Chancellery (the Chancellery of the Government) in 1921, a year after the Estonian War of Independence.

The building of the Riigikogu was inaugurated in Toompea Castle in 1922. A new five-storey archives building was completed in Toompea in 1937.

According to the statutes approved by the Riigikogu, the State Archives became the archive permanently preserving the documents of all state agencies. The documents that were more than five years old were received from the state authorities.

In 1924, tasks of the head of the State Chancellery were also assigned to the head of the State Archives and at the same time the head was appointed head of the State Library.

The abovementioned system was destroyed in 1940 by the Soviet authorities.

### **The Archives of the Riigikogu 1995□2006**

The first parliament after the Republic of Estonia regained independence was the 7th Riigikogu which started its first session on September 30, 1992.

The Archives of the Riigikogu was established in 1995, when the 7th Riigikogu concluded its work. Several questions arose with the establishment of the Archives:

✓ Formation of the funds of the Riigikogu Archives

The 1992 Government of the Republic Act established that original copies of the acts adopted by the Riigikogu were to be stored in the State Chancellery of the Republic of Estonia. Therefore the acts adopted by the 7th and some of the acts adopted by the 8th Riigikogu were handed over to the State Chancellery Documentation Department. This contradicted the generally accepted principle of provenance according to which documents created in the course of the activities of an institution form a part of the institution's archival funds. The above-mentioned requirement was omitted from the new Government of the Republic Act passed in December 1995. The State Chancellery returned the original copies of the legal acts to the Archives of the Riigikogu (approximately 670 documents).

✓ The question of provision of archival services to the Riigikogu

In 1995, an agreement between the Chancellery of the Riigikogu and the National Library was concluded according to which the maintenance of the Riigikogu Archives was to be ensured by the National Library (which is also our Parliament's Library). The premises for the archives were located in the building of the Riigikogu.

The National Library was responsible for keeping the Archives of the Riigikogu until 2006. In 2006, the Archives was reorganised under the Documentation and Records Management Department of the Chancellery of the Riigikogu.

### **The Archives of the Riigikogu 2006–2011**

As of 2006, the Archives of the Riigikogu forms part of the Documentation and Records Management Department of the Chancellery of the Riigikogu.

The Department offers all kinds of document-related services:

- ✓ consultation in language issues,
- ✓ drawing up verbatim records and minutes of the Riigikogu sessions,
- ✓ translating the documents needed by the Riigikogu,
- ✓ records management of the Riigikogu and the Chancellery

Its structural units are:

- ✓ Draft Legislation Service
- ✓ Stenography Service
- ✓ Translation Bureau
- ✓ Records Management Service

The Archives of the Riigikogu is the part of the Records Management Service which controls the life cycle of the documents created or received in the course of the activities of the Riigikogu and the Chancellery from the very beginning (compiling the retention schedules) to the end (creating the rules of preservation and disposal and preserving the documents).

The Archives of the Riigikogu stores the documents dating from 1992 up to the present time. The Archives is made up of documents of the Plenary Assembly, committees, factions and the Board of the Riigikogu, and the Chancellery of the Riigikogu. We also keep the documents of two independent committees: the National Electoral Committee and the Political Parties Financing Surveillance Committee. In addition to paper based records, the Archives stores a collection of photographs reflecting the activities of the Riigikogu starting from 1992, and video recordings of the sittings of the Riigikogu. Video recording started from the opening sitting of the 9th Riigikogu (18 March 1999).

As at 1 January 2011, the Archives contains about of 12 000 archive files, of which about 10 000 are paper based files for permanent and long-term conservation and 2000 are for temporary conservation,

250 photograph document files (3600 positives),

350 video recordings in VHS format of the plenary sittings of the previous 11th Riigikogu, and the current 12th Riigikogu.

Recordings of the sittings of earlier 9th and 10th Riigikogu have been transferred for deposit in the Estonian Film Archive.

202 CD-s

83 dictophone cassettes

51 audio cassettes

The delivered documents are archived and entered in the list of records (electronic register).

According to the Archives Act, all administrative agencies (e.g. the Office of the Riigikogu, the Office of the President, the Supreme Court, etc.) must transfer their records of archival value to the National Archives twenty years after their creation. The new Archives Act will enter into force in 2012: the records will have to be transferred after ten years.

### **Repositories and preservation conditions of the Archives**

From 1995 to 2009, the Archive was located in the building of the Riigikogu in Toompea Castle.

In 2009, the Riigikogu archive moved to new premises in a recently renovated building on Toompea Hill close to the Castle – the so-called Commander's House dating from the 17–18th century. The old rooms had been too small for the increasing number of records and they did not meet the proper conditions. In the new archive premises, storage areas are about twice as large as the previous ones.

At the end of the 17th century when the building was completed, it became the residence of the Commander of the city and it remained so also after 1710 when Peter I occupied Tallinn. The great-grandfather of Alexander Pushkin, Abram (Ibragim) Hannibal, of African origin, who lived in this building when he was the Commander of Tallinn from 1742 until 1752, is considered to be its most well known resident. It is also known that Pushkin's grandfather Ossip Hannibal was born in that building.

In addition to the archive, the new building houses the National Electoral Committee, and the Information Centre and the Translation Bureau of the Chancellery of the Riigikogu.

The archive rooms are situated on the ground floor and partly in the cellar. They include repositories for records of archival value and for permanent conservation (with an area of 133 m<sup>2</sup>) and for records for short-term conservation (37 m<sup>2</sup>), the photo and video archive, the research hall and the archivist's workroom. The archive rooms have electrical floor heating and there are no water pipes going through the rooms. The ventilation system ensures a stable humidity and temperature regime (temperature 15–20 °C, humidity 30–50 %) in repositories which can be followed through network monitoring on a twenty-four hour basis.

## **Access to the records in the Archives of the Riigikogu**

According to the Public Information Act, all state and government agencies of Estonia are required to ensure access to the information in their possession for every person in the quickest and easiest manner possible without charge unless payment for the direct expenses relating to the release of the information is prescribed by law.

The head of an agency may establish a restriction on access to information and classify information as information intended for internal use.

There are strict terms and procedures for establishing restrictions on access to information. The general rule is that a restriction applies for as long as necessary, but not for longer than five years. The head of an agency may extend the term by up to five years if the reason for establishment of the restriction on access continues to exist.

A restriction on access to information which contains private personal data applies for 75 years.

The majority of the records in the Archives of the Riigikogu are open for everyone. According to an approximate estimation, circa 10 per cent of documents of archival value are subject to an access restriction and a majority of these are documents of the Foreign Affairs Committee.

The Archives is open for public from Monday to Thursday from 9.00 a.m. to 6.00 p.m. and Fridays from 9.00 a.m. to 4.45 p.m.

The Archives receives an average of 260 inquiries in a year which are registered in the inquiries register.

About half of them are so-called “internal inquiries” from Members of the Riigikogu and officials of the Chancellery. The rest of the inquiries come from outside, that is, from different state authorities, private companies, legal aid offices, educational institutions as well as from private individuals.

Today’s means of communication enable to reply to inquiries electronically, without visiting the archive. The majority of inquiries are replied to by e-mail and by phone and the desired document is sent to the person by e-mail in scanned form. However, more extensive research works like term papers and

final papers of students require in-house use of archive documents. For this purpose, there are six places for archive visitors in the research room, with the possibility to use the computer and the photocopying machine.

With increasing publication of the documents related to the work of the parliament on the Riigikogu website, the number of archive inquiries has decreased.

### **Recent projects**

- ✓ Creating a new electronic information and records management system

In the 21st century there has been a rapid increase in the creation of electronic records in both public and private sectors.

Practically all documents which the Riigikogu receives from the state or governmental agencies are created electronically and sent directly from their electronic records management system into ours.

The documents are still printed out and archived on paper even though they may have been created or received electronically.

In 2010, the Riigikogu started the EMS3 (=electronic management system) project, aiming to create a new (third in order) information and records management system by 2012. The new system will enable us to consider electronically created documents as originals. It will contain all workflows of the Riigikogu and the Chancellery and it will enable us to manage our records electronically starting from their creation until their disposal or transfer to the National Archives.

Although the system permits transferring the electronic records directly from our system to the digital archives of the National Archives there is still a discussion about the need for a parallel electronic archive of the Riigikogu.

- ✓ Digitising parliamentary documents

In order to improve the availability of information, the Documentation and Records Management Department of the Chancellery of the Riigikogu has launched a project in the course of which archive documents of earlier periods which are of interest to the public will be digitised and published on the web.

In connection with the twentieth anniversary of restoration of independence celebrated this year, we published both on the web and in 28 paper volumes the verbatim records of the 12th Supreme Council (the first freely elected national representative body in Estonia after the beginning of the Soviet occupation) which declared the restoration of the independence of Estonia.

In summer 2012, we will celebrate the twentieth anniversary of our Constitution. On this occasion, we will publish the verbatim records of the Constitutional Assembly – this time, only as a web publication.

In a long-term perspective, we are planning to digitise the verbatim records of all legislative bodies of Estonia and to publish them on the web.

### **Conclusion**

After restoration of independence, the archive of the Riigikogu has moved towards increasing openness.

Active engagement in the “digital revolution” has brought a considerable growth of the number of electronic documents and, at the same time, an increasing availability of documents. We are trying to contribute to it for our part by digitising current paper documents and publishing them on the Riigikogu website.

The conditions of storage of paper documents and opportunities for servicing researchers have also improved.

We continue to be open to all who are interested in parliamentary information.