

Parliamentary Committee for Investigating the Actions Taken by the State of Latvia in Assessing the Causes of the Tragedy in Zolitūde on 21 November 2013, Improving the Legislative Framework and Practical Measures to be Taken by the Public Administration and Municipalities in Order to Prevent Recurrence of Similar Tragedies, as well as Mitigating the Consequences of the Tragedy

In November 2014, the Saeima took the decision to set up the Parliamentary Committee for Investigating the Actions Taken by the State of Latvia in Assessing the Causes of the Tragedy in Zolitūde on 21 November 2013, Improving the Legislative Framework and Practical Measures to be Taken by the Public Administration and Municipalities in Order to Prevent Recurrence of Similar Tragedies, as well as Mitigating the Consequences of the Tragedy. The tenure of the Committee was set at one year.

The Parliamentary Committee for Investigating the Actions Taken by the State of Latvia in Assessing the Causes of the Tragedy in Zolitūde on 21 November 2013, Improving the Legislative Framework and Practical Measures to be Taken by the Public Administration and Municipalities in Order to Prevent Recurrence of Similar Tragedies, as well as Mitigating the Consequences of the Tragedy, is the first parliamentary investigative committee which allows the public to follow its meetings through live video broadcasts and which has created its own website in order to implement the principle of openness.

The goals and tasks of the Committee are defined in its title – to investigate the actions taken by the state of Latvia in assessing the following aspects of the tragedy in Zolitūde on 21 November 2013:

- causes leading to the tragedy;
- measures taken by public administration and municipalities in improving the legislative framework in order to prevent recurrence of similar tragedies;
- measures taken to improve the work of public administration and municipalities in order to prevent recurrence of similar tragedies;
- measures taken by public administration and municipalities to mitigate the consequences of the tragedy.

According to the resolution of the parliament and as defined in its title, the Committee's task is to study and analyse the mistakes made by the public administration and, in accordance with Article 13 of the Law on Parliamentary Investigative Committees, to draft a final report providing an assessment of deficiencies identified in the actions of public administration and in legislation, drawing conclusions and proposing ways to correct the identified deficiencies. The responsibility of specific individuals for the deadly roof collapse will be determined by a court of law on the basis of evidence collected by the State Police. Supervising the work done by the entity directing the proceedings – in this case, the State Police – is the responsibility of the Prosecutor's Office. However, the Parliamentary Committee for Investigating the Actions Taken by the State of Latvia in Assessing the Causes of the Tragedy in Zolitūde on 21 November 2013, Improving the Legislative Framework and Practical Measures to be Taken by the Public Administration and Municipalities in Order to Prevent Recurrence of Similar Tragedies, as well as Mitigating the Consequences of the Tragedy, also has the right to include in its final report an assessment of the work done by the State Police.

In order to achieve the goals and tasks set for the Committee, its functions have been divided into 4 main areas:

1. Legal framework for the construction sector:
 - What were the most crucial deficiencies in the legal framework for the construction sector and its implementation up until 21 November 2013?
 - What amendments have been introduced over the past year? What have they changed/improved?
 - What measures has the Ministry of Economics taken to improve the legal framework for construction, supervision, control and safety?
 - What deficiencies continue to exist in the legal framework for construction?
 - How does the current construction legislation distribute responsibility among the contracting authority, owner, contractor and supervisors?
 - What has the government and the Prime Minister done to mitigate the consequences of the tragedy?
2. Construction supervision and control:
 - Responsibilities of municipalities and the public administration; the dissolution of the state construction inspectorate; work of construction inspectors; operation, scope of responsibility and shortcomings of control institutions prior to 21 November 2013;
 - Performance assessment of control institutions (including independence of the construction inspectorate and construction inspectors).
3. Management of emergency situations and deficiencies in the civil defence system:
 - Timely provision of accurate information in emergency situations (information exchange with victims, their relatives and the general public); communication between the state and the public in crisis situations (communication with victims and the general public);
 - Readiness of emergency services to respond to crisis situations;
 - Progress in drafting draft laws and accompanying Cabinet of Ministers regulations on civil defence and disaster management (legislation regulating the procedure of evacuations upon hearing the general alarm).
4. Social security system:
 - Organising social support in emergency situations (relief payments, compensations, pensions, etc.);
 - Social protection for orphans and widows of victims.

These areas will serve as the basis for the Committee's final report, which may be supplemented with the proposals submitted by experts, public officials and general public.

Invited experts

According to Article 169 of the Rules of Procedure of the Saeima, a committee has the right to invite experts, either on a permanent or ad hoc basis. These experts act as advisors of the committee.

Based on the Committee's decision of 27 November 2014 and Article 8 of the Law on Parliamentary Investigative Committees, the Committee has invited a representative of the Prosecutor's Office of the Republic of Latvia as a permanent expert.

With reference to the concerns expressed during the Committee meeting of 12 January 2015 about potential risks of corruption in the construction sector, a representative of the Corruption Prevention and Combating Bureau has been appointed as a permanent expert while the Committee discusses the legal framework for the construction sector, as well as supervisory and control mechanisms.

According to the decision of the Committee of 22 December 2014, several institutions have been requested to delegate their representatives as permanent experts. The Committee unanimously agreed on a requirement for all the permanent experts, prior to all meetings, to affirm by their signature that they have read and understood Article 11 of the Law on Parliamentary Investigative Committees.

According to the decision of the Committee of 22 December 2014, experts at risk of a conflict of interest due to their involvement in the investigation and litigation related to the Zolitūde tragedy are allowed to participate only in meetings where their opinion is essential for the Committee's work.

Members of the Committee

All members of the Committee, the Chairman, Deputy Chairperson and the Secretary of the Committee combine their duties in the Committee with other duties of MPs and politicians. Nearly all members of the Committee work in two standing committees and at least one subcommittee, groups for interparliamentary relations with other countries, permanent delegations and parliamentary groups. The Committee employs one full-time staff member.

Laws and regulations governing the work of the Committee:

Article 26 of the Constitution

Rules of Procedure of the Saeima

The Law on Parliamentary Investigative Committees

Resolution of the Saeima of 11 November 2014 on establishing the Parliamentary Committee for Investigating the Actions Taken by the State of Latvia in Assessing the Causes of the Tragedy in Zolitūde on 21 November 2013, Improving the Legislative Framework and Practical Measures to be Taken by the Public Administration and Municipalities in Order to Prevent Recurrence of Similar Tragedies, as well as Mitigating the Consequences of the Tragedy

Currently the Committee is continuing its investigation. The preliminary conclusions and proposals regarding identified imperfections and proposed improvements in the legal framework for the construction sector and construction supervision will be included in the interim report to be finalised in June 2015. The final report will contain the Committee's findings on the identified imperfections in the actions taken by the state, as well as in relevant laws and regulations. Likewise, the final report will contain conclusions and proposals for improvement in all areas covered by the Committee.