

INTERNATIONAL INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY ALLIANCE

2003 SPECIAL 301 REPORT

LATVIA

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Special 301 recommendation: IIPA recommends that Latvia remain on the Special 301 Watch List in 2003 (where it has been since 2000) because of widespread piracy compounded by ineffective and inadequate enforcement of criminal, civil, administrative and border measures.

Overview of key problems: Copyright protection is still not on the list of priorities of the Latvian government. There is no political will to efficiently enforce the IPR legislation and thus enforcement still continues to be virtually non-existent in practice. Latvia's poor copyright enforcement, both in-country and at its border, has resulted in high levels of piracy, exceeding the 50% level in all copyright sectors. The biggest challenge Latvia faces is making its copyright enforcement regime effective. Estimated trade losses due to piracy in Latvia amounted to almost \$16 million in 2002.

The enforcement problems include insufficient financial and human resources for the Economic Police to carry out effective seizures of material, and Municipal Police that are generally ill-prepared for street raids at open city markets, kiosks and supermarkets selling all forms of illegal copyright material (music, business and entertainment software, and audiovisual material). The majority of the Municipal Police claim that copyright protection does not fall within its competence. This incomprehensible argument clearly conflicts with the fact that the Municipal Police has the right to confiscate illegal goods (i.e. pirated goods) and ban the illegal trading. The only positive news so far is that the Municipal Police in Riga, who have proved to be more active than their counterparts in rest of the country, conducted various raids and initiated the administrative cases in Riga since 2001. Unfortunately, the result of these successful raids continues to be seriously hindered by the: (a) poor cooperation with the prosecutors in moving cases forward; (b) onerous evidentiary requirements which only cause further delays; and (c) courts which are generally reluctant to proceed the copyright cases. The penalties for copyright infringements are from deterrent (usually comparable to fines for minor administrative offences such as parking fines, etc.) and courts have the unfortunate tendency to return the infringing goods to the pirates. As a result, the Riga's Municipal Police and all other law enforcement officials are rapidly losing their motivation to initiate any anti-piracy actions.

A major weakness in the Latvian enforcement regime remains the lack of effective border enforcement, especially the failures of customs officials to commence actions without court order and to target materials transshipped through (and stored in) Latvia for other territories. Transshipment in Latvia of pirated optical media product causes significant problems for all the copyright industries (but not as serious as the transshipment in Lithuania). Latvia is fast becoming a dumping site and transit point for the distribution of pirated copyright material, especially entertainment software, produced by Russian syndicates. Latvia's 2000 copyright

law, while relatively modern, still contains several key deficiencies, including no provision for civil *ex parte* search procedures.

Actions which the Latvian government should take in 2003: To correct the deficiencies, the Latvian government should take concerted actions on the following issues—

Enforcement

- The government must publicly demonstrate the political will to implement effective IPR law enforcement and follow up as a matter of priority by instructing all Latvian enforcement agencies to make copyright piracy a priority issue for action;
- Latvian enforcement authorities must commence criminal raids and prosecutions, as well as implement administrative actions, including against operations run by organized crime elements;
- Customs officers must strengthen their activities to intercept pirate product and act on their own initiative, *ex officio*, as permitted under the law;
- Administrative remedies (like removing business licenses and issuing fines) must actually be imposed (but not as a substitute for criminal actions, as appropriate);
- The Latvian judiciary must relax its onerous evidentiary burdens regarding the preparation of expert reports in criminal cases involving sound recording and audiovisual piracy;
- The Latvian judiciary must improve the speed of the proceedings in copyright cases and impose deterrent penalties;
- Improve cooperation between customs and the police, and as well as the police, prosecutors and the judiciary. Intensive educational training for enforcement bodies including judges and prosecutors has started and needs to continue.
- Establish better cooperation with Estonian and Lithuanian customs agencies.

Legislation

- Amend the relevant Latvian law to provide for a civil *ex parte* search order, as required by TRIPS Article 50;
- Amend the criminal code and the Administrative Offenses Act to increase the level of criminal and administrative sanctions in copyright cases to levels which deter piracy, as mandated by TRIPS;
- Pursue further refinement of the copyright law in order to fully and effectively implement Latvia's obligations under the two 1996 WIPO treaties by amending the deficiencies which cause the law to be inadequate to protect copyright holders' rights, especially in online environment.

LATVIA
ESTIMATED TRADE LOSSES DUE TO PIRACY
(in millions of U.S. dollars)
and LEVELS OF PIRACY: 1999 – 2002¹

INDUSTRY	2002		2001		2000		1999	
	Loss	Level	Loss	Level	Loss	Level	Loss	Level
Motion Pictures	NA	85%	1.5	NA	1.5	85%	NA	100%
Records & Music	8.0	67%	NA	NA	4.0	65%	4.0	65%
Business Software Applications ²	7.9	57%	NA	59%	NA	77%	NA	84%
Entertainment Software	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Books	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
TOTALS	15.9+		1.5+		5.5+		4.0+	

Latvia is a beneficiary under the U.S. Generalized System of Preferences (GSP) trade program, which requires beneficiary countries to afford adequate and effective intellectual property rights protection to U.S. copyright owners.³ In addition, Latvia signed a Trade Relations and IPR Agreement in April 1994, which required significant legal changes in Latvia's IPR regime by the end of 1995, and later signed a Bilateral Investment Treaty with the U.S. in January 1995. Latvia joined the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 1999 and is obligated to have implemented both the letter and the spirit (performance) of the TRIPS Agreement. The European Commission too has identified problems with inadequate copyright enforcement in Latvia and called on that government to intensify measures to combat piracy and counterfeiting, strengthen border controls, and improve coordination between enforcement bodies.⁴

COPYRIGHT PIRACY IN LATVIA

Optical Media Transshipment and Other Forms of Piracy in Latvia

There are no reports of optical media production in Latvia at this time; Latvia does not have an industrial capacity optical disc plant. The only Baltic state known to have an OD plant is Lithuania.

¹ The methodology used by IIPA member associations to calculate these estimated piracy levels and losses is described in IIPA's 2003 Special 301 submission, and is available on the IIPA website at www.iipa.com/pdf/2003spec301methodology.pdf.

² BSA's estimated piracy losses and levels for 2002 are preliminary, and will be finalized in mid-2003. BSA's trade loss estimates reported here represent losses due to piracy which affect only U.S. computer software publishers in this country, and differ from BSA's trade loss numbers released separately in its annual global piracy study which reflects losses to (a) all software publishers in this country (including U.S. publishers) and (b) losses to local distributors and retailers in this country.

³ For the first 11 months of 2002, \$10.3 million worth of Latvian goods (or 7% of Latvia's total imports to the U.S. from January to November) entered the U.S. under the duty-free GSP code, representing a 30.2% increase over the same time period last year. For more information on the history of Venezuela under Special 301 review, see Appendices D and E of this submission.

⁴ To access the European Commission's October 2002 annual report on EU enlargement and Latvia, go to <http://www.euractiv.com/cgi-bin/cgint.exe/?1100=1&204&OIDN=1504033>.

Weak border control and lack of co-operation between the enforcement agencies and judiciary continues to encourage the flow of pirated goods through Latvia. The country's geographic location surrounded by three countries known to export pirated sound recordings (CD, audiocassettes) and audiovisual carriers (VHS, DVD), game cartridges and optical media products—Lithuania, Belarus and Russia—places Latvia at great risk for being overwhelmed by large quantities of pirated product which has nearly crushed the market for legitimate product. Due to the relatively small Latvian market, pirated products are further distributed to Scandinavia, Eastern and Western Europe. Pirated material, such as pirated audio CDs, CD-ROMs containing business software, videos, audiocassettes, and videogame cartridges, regularly enters Latvia from Lithuania. The recording industry reports that significant amount of the illegal pre-recorded optical media material containing sound recordings comes to Latvia from Russia. However, CD-Rs with the illegal music content are mainly produced locally and targeted for the local market.

Imports: The motion picture industries note that the same legitimate Russian-dubbed video selling in Russia for under US\$3 is marketed in Latvia for \$5.50 to \$7.50. The business software industry estimates that some 99% of illegal software on CD-ROMs found in Latvia have entered from the borders, yet Latvian customs have yet to seize a single shipment. The entertainment software industry reports that all product shipped into Latvia comes from Russia.

Transshipment: The recording industry reports that Latvia (together with Lithuania and Estonia) transships pirate CDs into the European Union by using sea links with Finland and the other Scandinavian countries. The transshipment involves moving material into and out of other parts of Central and Eastern Europe as well as Russia. Of the three Baltic States, Lithuania is the most egregious source of transshipment. This transshipment problem indicates the importance of effective border enforcement measures in Latvia, and the rest of the Baltic countries. For the entertainment software companies, largely those publishing PC games, it is not sufficiently clear how much of the Russian pirate product is shipped beyond Latvia. However, the quantities that are not shipped onward are enough to drive local piracy rates for entertainment software product to 95%.

CD-R piracy and Internet piracy: The recording industry reports that MP3 piracy in Latvia is a fast-growing concern. There are many illegal sites hosted offering illegal musical material in MP3 format as well as the material offered for sale on the Internet that is distributed as physical discs through the mail (e.g., <http://mp3.matrix.lv>; www.dancebox.2000.lv). The same problems are faced by the entertainment software industry, with “warez” sites offering pirate videogames for direct download as well as for use as a “master” copy from which to burn CDs.

Some illegal sites are operating also in government-controlled servers. The recording reports that in 2002, IFPI identified and sent 57 “cease and desist” notices to 167 infringing sites estimated to contain around 46,000 illegal files. As a result, 72 of those sites (i.e., 43%) were removed from Internet. Despite the increasing figures, several websites have been operating with impunity for over three years without any prosecutorial action to shut them down. To date there are also no court cases dealing with Internet piracy. BSA endorses the view that Internet piracy is increasingly prevalent in Latvia. The Latvian enforcement authorities have not addressed piracy on the Internet at all, which resembles their inactivity to combat the physical piracy. This makes the proper and effective implementation of the WIPO treaties vital.

Records and music: Piracy of sound recordings and music is widespread in Latvia. The local recording industry group LaMPA reports that due to the ineffective enforcement the estimated level of music piracy continues to rise, reaching the 67% of the music market in 2002

(in 2000 and 2001 the levels of music piracy were 65% and 65% respectively). Estimated trade losses due to the piracy of sound recordings and musical compositions in Latvia in 2002 were \$8.0 million. The biggest distribution points are in the Latvia's capital, at two bazaars in Riga, which have 60 to 100 sales points that sell pirate audio product. The prices of the pirate music CDs are approximately US\$4.50 for international repertoire and US\$5.00 for local repertoire. Most of the CDs with international repertoire are imported from Russia, Belarus, Poland and Lithuania, and are further distributed to Scandinavia, Eastern and Western Europe. Local repertoire is pirated on CD-Rs, which is a new piracy trend in Latvia constituting around 3% of the overall music piracy. In addition to the illegal distribution of traditionally pirated sound carriers, LaMPA has identified the illegal import of the sound carriers made for the legal distribution in Russia only. According to Article 148 of the Criminal Code, such distribution of legal copies not authorized by the rights holders is considered to be a copyright crime in Latvia. Another continuous disturbing trend outside Riga, notably in the city called Ventspils in Western Latvia, is the pirated music carriers being sold under the counters of the supermarkets and in the legitimate retail shops in those supermarkets.

One particularly disturbing and rapidly developing piracy form is the hardly detectable so-called "hand-to-hand" piracy, i.e., the illegal sales of pirated sound carriers offered upon the catalogue by the physical persons. Pirates in Latvia are known to justify "hand-to-hand" piracy vis-à-vis the enforcement authorities with the incompatible argument the products they are selling are made for the private use. This practice does not comply with the TRIPS Agreement enforcement standards and must be eliminated as an excuse for the police (Economic, Municipal) and prosecutors to permit illegal activity from continuing. In general, the recording industry reports that the police have not taken decisive action against the open markets; there are not seizures or raids, much less prosecutions. The recording industry together with all the other industries believe that the Latvian customs authorities must take *ex officio* action when they detect border trade and domestic enforcement violations and they must work in cooperation with the European Union and Russian customs authorities to improve their efforts to stop the trafficking of material.

Business software: The Business Software Alliance (BSA) reports that almost all of the infringing software enters Latvia from Russia, Belarus, or neighboring countries. Poor border enforcement and the lack of cooperation between neighboring countries (especially Estonia and Lithuania) are problems that need the most attention. BSA estimates that business software piracy in Latvia is 57%, causing approximately \$7.9 million in trade losses in 2002.

Audiovisual piracy: The Motion Picture Association (MPA) reports that the video piracy rate in Latvia continues to be estimated at approximately 85%. Corruption and organized criminal activity are major problems. Although piracy is not as overt as it has been in the past, some street traders still discreetly solicit customers with pirate catalogues. Pirate copies are also available in video rental stores as early as two months before their Latvian theatrical release. Latvia has a sizeable Russian minority (almost 50%), which often purchases pirate and unauthorized Russian-language product. Web-based piracy is also starting to appear. Pirate sites marketing hard goods have been discovered and are expected to be a growing problem in the upcoming years. There are no available figures for the broadcast piracy or theatrical piracy rates.

Videogame piracy: The entertainment software industry (Interactive Digital Software Association, IDSA) concurs that border enforcement is a major problem in Latvia. They note that this problem must be addressed to cut off the flow of material from organized crime syndicates in Russia shipped into or through Latvia. The country has now become a base for

the distribution of illegal material into neighboring countries. Entertainment software companies also have to deal with the problem of piracy at Internet cafes. In Latvia, only 10% of the Internet cafes used licensed products in their shops. As mentioned above, the Internet and warez sites are being used to distribute pirated games. CD-burning is another piracy phenomenon adversely affecting this industry.

COPYRIGHT ENFORCEMENT IN LATVIA

Improve Centralized Coordination and Communication

Latvia has taken legal and some structural actions to improve its enforcement mechanisms, including organizational efforts. Unfortunately, the restructuring has generally not proven to bring the desired results. Structural changes are merely enforced and are more formal steps to confirm to the general public that the government takes anti-piracy actions. For example, the Minister of the Interior, who is authorized to enforce the copyright law and other laws on intellectual property used to hold meetings on IPR protection with the well-known people from the copyright industries. These meetings were held under the framework of the Society Consultative Council, which in addition to IPR enforcement covers also other fields. As stated above, these meetings were very formal, with no actual follow-up actions. Furthermore, there is no information of the occurrence of those meetings since June 2002, i.e., before and after the Latvian parliamentary (and the government) elections in October 2002. Furthermore, so far the new government has not demonstrated any signs that would confirm an interest and willingness to address IPR protection issues in their agenda. In June 2002, a dedicated IPR enforcement division of state police was established; it is chronically understaffed (three people only) and under-resourced. This does not indicate the Latvian government's dedicated plan to effectively fight with piracy.

Weak Border Enforcement

Given that much (but not all) of the piracy problem in Latvia is due to the heavy importation of infringing materials from Russia, Belarus and Lithuania, it is essential that border measures be enforced in practice. As part of Latvia's WTO accession package in 1999, several laws and decrees were passed to improve substantive border enforcement measures. Two laws form the basis for Customs enforcement measures in Latvia: (1) the 1997 Customs law (of June 11, 1997); and (2) a Cabinet of Ministers Regulation on Customs measures for IPR protection (of February 9, 1999) which entered into force on July 1, 1999. Unfortunately, there have been no signs of progress with border enforcement since these measures were adopted.

The Latvian government ruled an additional 20 new customs regional officials and 2 additional persons to the Customs Head Office solely for IPR protection in spring 2002. Unfortunately, these 20 new customs officials have been occupied with other fields and *de facto* not dealing with IPR protection. Thus, customs has failed to enforce the government ruling.

An ongoing problem has been that customs has refused to seize suspect product without a court order (*ex officio*), and customs officials have admitted problems with the detection of illegal material. The customs officers are not using the *ex officio* even though the legislation allows it. Customs officials have the authority for *ex officio* actions under the Government Regulation No. 420 for customs to apply control measures for IPR protection.

Furthermore, the culture ministry is pushing *ex officio* for customs also to the forthcoming changes to the Administrative Offense Act.

One step the Latvian government could take to improve enforcement would be to establish better coordination of customs authorities between Latvia's neighbors in Estonia and Lithuania. This would be especially helpful to stem the tide of pirated Russian material entering Latvia (and the other countries). Russian customs officials have agreed to cooperate and share cross-border information beginning in 2001.

Police Raids and Results

The recording industry reports that in 2002 the Economic Police made a total of 263 raids and seized the total of 40,620 pirated products (of those 30,850 audio CDs and CD-Rs, 2,821 audiocassettes, 5,974 VHS tapes, 975 DVDs, 424 VCDs), which is unacceptably low in comparison with the high piracy levels in Latvia. The Economic Police issued 235 administrative protocols for the IPR infringements and initiated 30 criminal cases. These are total figures, which the Economic Police cannot specify further, i.e., itemizing cases related to music, film, software and piracy, and counterfeiting (e.g., trademarks). Regretfully, there is no information of the development of those cases.

There is also no information on the activities of the Municipal Police in 2002. As rightly feared a couple of years ago, due to the prosecutorial and judicial delays and obstacles, the Municipal Police have lost their motivation to initiate any anti-piracy activities. Yet in 2001, the Municipal Police in Riga distinguished themselves from counterparts in the rest of the country by conducting several raids in Latvia's capital, which in fact were not followed up on by the prosecution.

Prosecutorial Delays and Obstacles

Criminal prosecutions take a considerable time amount of time in Latvia. While administrative cases are described as relatively simple and can proceed in two to four months, criminal cases take 18 months to two years just to begin the trial. This is because criminal cases must proceed through three stages: first, the police review the preliminary records; second, there is a police investigation; and finally, the prosecutor must review and then get the Prosecutor's Office to issue a formal charge before the case can commence. Once the case has started, the procedures are complicated and delays are the usual result. In sum, the slow pace of criminal enforcement activity at the prosecution stage accounted for the poor quality of enforcement. Contrary to expectations, the Latvian enforcement authorities have merely used the existing and relatively sufficient enforcement legislation to combat piracy.

The Business Software Alliance (BSA) reports reasonable cooperation, albeit on a limited number of cases, from the Economic and Finance Police; mostly, this has focused on end-user raids. The Economic and Finance Police conducted a total of 24 raids in 2002 with the cooperation of BSA; 18 of these concerned end-users, 6 were of resellers. BSA was pleased to note that larger targets were the subject of these raids. As a result, three criminal cases, and seven administrative cases, were initiated. The administrative cases have resulted in low fines at an average level of 100 Lats: The criminal cases have yet to be resolved.

No Civil *Ex Parte* Search Provision

A glaring deficiency of the 2000 copyright law is that it fails to provide for a TRIPS-required civil *ex parte* search remedy. This omission must be corrected immediately. The lack of a civil *ex parte* search remedy is particularly harmful for BSA. In end-user piracy cases, the civil *ex parte* remedy is an essential enforcement tool, the absence of which leaves BSA overly dependent upon police cooperation in such cases. This cooperation has been, for practical and policy reasons, difficult to secure.

Inadequate Administrative Penalties

Copyright infringement cases in Latvia are often pursued as administrative offenses. Criminal cases take too long and certain civil tools (like the *ex parte* search) are not even available to copyright owners. Businesses, especially illegal kiosks and stores that sell pirated material, should be fined or their business licenses revoked; either of these measures would be important first steps toward proper enforcement of the copyright law. Unfortunately, convicted pirates can only be fined a minimum of 50-100 Lats and, in case of repeated infringement, a maximum of 250 Lats (US\$435), which are far from being deterrent.

Judicial Obstacles and Delays

The main reason for the slow and burdensome proceedings in IPR cases is that, due to the lack of relevant knowledge, the judiciary has literally created its own rules on IPR procedures using the former Soviet procedural codes as a basis. That explains the burdensome and excessive procedural requirements in IPR cases (e.g., burdensome expert opinions; see next paragraph). Even if the police and/or prosecutors have managed to get the courts to proceed with a case and take a decision, the sentence for IPR infringement (if any) is in virtually all cases far from deterrent and usually comparable to fines for minor administrative offenses such as parking fines, etc. Furthermore, the courts have the unfortunate tendency to return the infringing goods to the pirates. Furthermore, even after several legal reforms in Latvia's criminal legislation there are still no reports of any imprisonments imposed for the copyright crimes.

Onerous burdens in evidence collection: The copyright industries experienced substantial difficulties and delays in securing expert reports that courts systematically require in order to pursue criminal actions against piracy. Thus, cases have been chronically hampered because of the delays in securing this evidence. These delays have the effect of "pushing" criminal cases into the administrative areas, where they can be disposed of quickly, but at a much reduced penalty. This difficulty is not so much in the industries' ability to provide the evidence, but rather the problems in obtaining the expert reports without delay. Expert reports create a bottleneck in the Latvian criminal procedure.

COPYRIGHT AND RELATED REFORM IN LATVIA

The Copyright Law of 2000

Latvia made significant progress in recent years with the adoption of new laws and its accessions in important copyright and neighboring rights treaties. The history of Latvian copyright reform began in 1993, when Latvia overhauled its old Soviet-style copyright law.

Latvia became a member of the Berne Convention (August 11, 1995) and the Geneva Phonograms Convention (August 23, 1997); it also became a member of the Rome Convention (August 20, 1999). On January 21, 1999, the Latvian Parliament adopted a package of minor amendments to the Copyright Act, the Code of Administrative Offenses, the Criminal Code, the Consumer Protection Act and the Customs Act, to pave the way for Latvia's 1999 accession to the WTO. After a series of revision efforts in 1998 and 1999, Latvia's new Copyright Law was enacted, effective April 27, 2000 (with some provisions in force on January 1, 2001 and others on January 1, 2003).

On April 27, 2000, the new Copyright Law was adopted by the Parliament. While many of its provisions went into force on April 27, 2000, some provisions entered into force on January 1, 2001, and others will go into force on January 1, 2003. The new law made significant improvements to the former law, including definitions of critical rights such as reproduction right (including temporary copies), and a right of making available. The new package of amendments also changed the penalties for software piracy offenses; for example, for end-user and reseller piracy offenses, the penalties were increased from 200 Lats (US\$350) to 7,500 Lats (US\$13,070), with possible imprisonment of five years.

Even with the adoption of the 2000 copyright amendments, several TRIPS issues remain outstanding, or require further clarification in Latvia's relevant laws. These more troubling deficiencies include:

- No civil *ex parte* search procedure, a TRIPS-required tool, which is especially critical enforcement in business software actions.
- No clear protection for pre-existing works and sound recordings. Such protection is not clearly spelled out in the copyright law for works or sound recordings, although many Latvian experts have offered their view that such protection does exist under current law and Latvian officials acknowledge that such protection is required under the TRIPS Agreement (Articles 9, 12 and 14.6).
- Low administrative penalties that do not deter piracy. The current is a maximum of 250 Lats (US\$435).
- No deterrent criminal penalties (with the exception of provisions added for certain types of software piracy; the maximum penalty is 5 years' prison, up to 150 minimum wages).
- A dangerous provision in the Copyright Law [Article 69(3)] regarding the destruction of equipment used to produce illegal copies indicates that the equipment (and perhaps the illegal copies produced) can be given to charity. There was considerable confusion about this provision in discussions with Latvian officials; at the very least, it should be clarified. The criminal provisions do properly provide for the seizure and destruction of equipment. However, the industries believe that this charitable element should be eliminated from the copyright law; while such charitable giving is sometimes applied in trademark situations (e.g., counterfeit goods given to charity after the offending logos are removed), copyright presents a different situation.
- Provides only a right of remuneration for the broadcasting, public performance, and other communication to the public for producers of sound recordings. Latvia should be encouraged to give performing artists and phonogram producers an exclusive right of public communication, instead of merely a claim for remuneration. Market developments indicate that the future "delivery" of recorded music will increasingly be accomplished through the licensing of music services rather than the sale of physical

products, and non-interactive transmissions will compete with on-demand communications for listener loyalty. Both interactive and non-interactive services must operate under market principles. To achieve this, it is essential that rights holders, like producers of sound recordings, enjoy exclusive rights, and not merely rights to claim remuneration.

- Currently, one of the main obstacles to effective enforcement is created by cumbersome and unnecessary requirements of proof of rights ownership imposed upon the rights holders. The cumbersome burden of proof as to the ownership and subsistence of copyright and neighboring rights enables defendants to delay judicial proceedings, and in some cases even escape justice, even when it is clear from the outset that the plaintiff owns the copyright or neighboring rights in question. This issue has become particularly problematic now that hundreds of thousands of different infringing optical discs (CDs, CD-ROMs, VCDs, DVDs) are regularly seized during raids. Latvia should introduce a presumption of ownership for phonogram producers. The principle of presumption of ownership is not, in fact, a new phenomenon in Latvia's legislation. Latvian Copyright Law includes the same principle for authors [Article 8(1) of the Copyright Law].

WIPO Treaties

Latvia has deposited its instruments of access to both the WIPO Copyright Treaty and the WIPO Performances and Phonograms Treaty, and was one of the original 30 countries putting them into force in 2002. Now, Latvia must fully implement the obligations into national law. Some implementation provisions were adopted in the Copyright Law of April 2000, but many others still need to be enacted.

For example, Latvian law must allow rights holders to enforce their rights against the circumvention of technological protection measures. Technological protection measures are the tools that rights holders use to manage and control access to and copying of their works in the digital environment. Implementation of this requirement should include a prohibition on the manufacture, importation, sale, distribution, or other trafficking in circumventing devices or services that are aimed at circumventing technological protection measures, as well as outlawing acts of circumvention. In addition, rightsholders need to be able to protect so-called "copyright management information" that is attached to or accompanies a work or sound recording, including protection against the alteration, removal or falsification of this information. Latvia is working toward implementing the EU Copyright Directive.

Criminal Code

Latvia passed a new criminal law in June 1998, which entered into force on April 1, 1999. Of the three provisions in these amendments which relate to IPR protection (in particular, Articles 148-149), the criminal law now includes: fines for manufacturing, selling, storing or concealing unauthorized copies; confiscation of infringing copies and equipment; prison terms of one to two years for repeat offenders (including activities related to unauthorized decoders and smart cards); and up to five years imprisonment for organized crime activity. The fines range from between 50 and 200 times the minimum monthly salary (which as of January 1, 2003, is 70 Lats, or US\$120)—meaning the fines range between US\$7,200 to \$120,000. The Latvian government started to prepare the new draft of the Criminal Procedure Code in 2002. The draft is still at the government level and there is no further information as to when exactly it will go to the Parliament.

Administrative Offenses Act and the Civil Code

Article 2046 of the Administrative Offences Act sanctions the use of copyrighted material without a license and imposes a fine of up to 250 Lats (U.S.\$435), hardly a deterrent to the lucrative nature of piracy. The amendments to the Administrative Offences Act are currently in the Parliament waiting for the second reading, which has not scheduled yet. Reportedly, the Ministry of Culture has proposed to include the Municipal Police to be authorized to take actions against IPR infringements and increase the fines for legal entities infringing copyrights. Unfortunately, the last proposal has already been rejected by the Parliament.

There are no known pending amendments regarding civil penalties. Articles 1770-1792 (Civil Code) and Article 69 (Law on Copyright and Neighboring Rights) include civil sanctions for copyright violations. Given the wide-scale sale of piratical materials in open markets, the industries circulated several proposals to address this problem several years ago. One proposal would have revised the Administrative Code to ban the sale of music, audiovisual or computer program material at such open markets, which, unfortunately, was rejected by the Latvian government.

Government Software Management

The Business Software Alliance (BSA) reports that the level of unlicensed use of business software applications within the Latvian government remains at a very high level. No comprehensive review of software installations and licenses has taken place within the central or municipal government in Latvia, a situation that BSA recommends be addressed forthwith. Government use of software is seen as an essential behavior determinant by BSA for business users of software: it is essential that government take steps to regularize and legalize its use of business software applications in order to set an example to the software using community. BSA has had meetings with senior officials of the Latvian government in 2002 to discuss this problem, which have met with an encouraging and positive response from the Latvian government. However, expressions of willingness to address these problems have not been backed up by positive action. The situation concerning unlicensed use by the Latvian government is particularly acute as there is a widespread public perception in Latvia that the government is a user of unlicensed software. Accordingly, there is a general reluctance to legalize in the absence of a strong example being set by central government, and, in addition, police enforcement bodies feel they lack credibility in enforcing software piracy cases as the targets of such enforcement object to that enforcement on the basis that the police/government themselves are most likely illegal.