



# European Council: Republic of Estonia

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## 1 Introduction and Executive Summary

The Republic of Latvia is a state in the north-east of the European Union. Bordered by Latvia in the south, it is considered part of the group of states known as *Baltic States*. It also shares a border with Russia to the east and a sea border with Sweden. After declaring its independence from the Soviet Union in 1991, it joined the EU in 2004 and adopted the euro as the national currency in 2011 [1].

Delegates should focus on the following main points when representing Estonia in the European Union.

This is a list of items:

- Secure and improve military support for the protection of Estonia’s EU external border,
- further develop and implement the European Banking Union,
- secure funding for EU projects that are based in Latvia,
- ensure continuing close economic ties with other EU member states.

## 2 Societal and Economic History

The territory known as Latvia today has always been a pawn in international power struggles. Conquered by Poland in 1561, it was later colonised by Sweden in 1629. It remained under Swedish administration until the Great Northern War, after which it became Russian territory. Shortly after WWI, the Republic of Latvia declared independence from Russia for the first time in 1918 followed by a civil war in the region and later the international recognition of the Republic in 1919. However, it was occupied by German troops during WWII and later integrated into the Soviet Union. What followed was a period of Soviet oppression (Russian was declared the primary language, collective farming was introduced, etc.) during which at least 136 000 Latvians were deported to Soviet concentration camps. This is one of the reasons Latvians are quite russiophobic to this day, even though 20% of the population is Russian today. In 1991, the Republic of Latvia became independent once again and has since been part of a very pro-European group of states, joining the EU in 2004.

Due to its location as a coastal state of the Baltic Sea, Latvia has always been a very important trading point in Eastern Europe. The economy was mainly based on farming up until the independence from the Soviet Union. Nowadays, Latvia has a strong service and financial sector, which underwent a major setback during the financial crisis in 2008/9. A high unemployment rate of 7% is just one of the consequences still felt today [3]. Furthermore, Latvia relies heavily on the EU as an export and import partner. Its top export products are alcohol and wheat [4].

## 3 Political Position

The current government of Latvia is a centre-right coalition of five conservative and liberal parties. Its prime minister is Arturs Krisjanis Karins, who is a MP for the centre-right unity party. The Latvian government has always been very pro-European and as a former MEP, Karins knows the procedures and perks of the European Union

### NATO's Military Buildup In Eastern Europe



**Fig. 1:** NATO’s military presence in Eastern Europe. Source: Statista (<https://www.statista.com/chart/7877/natos-military-buildup-in-eastern-europe/>)

very well. In this role, he was a member of the European People’s Party. His top priority in office is to improve Latvia’s financial sector. So far, he has not achieved any major political goals, as he has only been in office since January 2019 after two failed attempts to form a coalition. [5]

Consequently, in regards to the EU, the Latvian government is in favour of an effective banking union (for further reading on this topic: see link [6]). Furthermore, it supports a new EU budget, which allocates sufficient means to counter the migration, security and defence challenges. However, this should not be financed at the expense of reduced funding for the EU’s cohesion and common agricultural policy. Latvia believes it is essential for the Union’s competitiveness that work be continued on the development and full implementation of a digital single market. As a consequence thereof, the development of a unitary cyber-security strategy is a European policy priority [7].

Lastly, to tackle the migration Latvia supports an effective control at the EU’s external borders, enhanced cooperation with the countries of origin and transit, as well as cooperation on the internal dimension of migration, including solidarity with EU Member States exposed to the heaviest burden of migration pressures. Meanwhile, Latvia retains its position that solidarity measures should not be automatic, and the mechanisms for the relocation of asylum seekers should not be compulsory.

## 4 Foreign Policy [7]

Close cooperation with the other Baltic States has always been one of the key aspects in the Republic’s foreign policy. In its position as a country with an EU external border, Latvia relies on military support from other EU and NATO states. Especially, in regard to its history, the continuing Russian aggression towards the west and the annexation of Crimea, Latvia is fearing Russian interference in

its domestic policy and sovereignty. Additionally, Russian missile drills in its exclusive economic zone are a deliberate demonstration of force aimed at challenging Latvia's alliances and threatening its people. This creates a military dependence on other NATO states, expressly the US. Wherefore, Latvia, and also the other Baltic States, have maintained a very active political dialogue with the administration of the current US President. They hope this will further enhance the US military presence in the Baltic region and the continued US support for increasing the defence capabilities of the Baltic States. The government is also expecting the European allies to ensure an equivalent contribution to NATO defence in a foreseeable period and commits to increase its contribution to NATO. Furthermore, Latvia is also strongly supporting the idea of enhancing the EU's military capacities and heavily involved in already launched projects. Latvia will also focus its attention on facilitating military mobility within the EU territory. In this context, close cooperation with Great Britain is also vital even after its exit from the Union.

Latvia's position on the conflicts in the Middle East have been clearly formulated and are in line with EU foreign policy approaches. This includes the engagement in Syria in form of reconstruction only after the the completion of the political transition process. The EU should increase its role in the Middle East Peace Process (MEPP) and a two-state solution is preferred for resolving this conflict. In addition, the Republic of Latvia supports the Iran deal, but desires a common solution with the United States.

It is in Latvia's interests that good trade relations are maintained with the US, and Latvia has been consistently expressing that position in the respective EU trade formats and bilateral meetings. A successful outcome of the EU-US trade negotiations is important to Latvia in the context of both economic and broader geopolitical interests. In 2019, the government plans to focus on exploring the economic potential in dialogue with Latin American and African countries. Finally, building closer relations between the EU and the Eastern Partnership countries and the continued support and aid for them is important.

## 5 Domestic Policy

A continuing issue in Latvia is the large Russian population. As explained above, Latvians are very skeptical and afraid of Russian political influence in their country. Therefore, any attempt to integrate the large Russian population into society have been met with backlashes. Today, approximately 300 000 so-called 'non-citizens' in Latvia. They are not allowed to vote, nor to hold public office. They are also not allowed to work for the police or the fire brigade. Furthermore, the government tells everyone what language the children are supposed to learn (there were even plans to ban Russian from the school syllabus), which festival days are celebrated, and which aren't. The United Nations has already sharply criticized Latvia, accusing the country of not doing enough to encourage integration. After all, every third person living in Latvia speaks Russian. Yet Latvian is the only official language [8].

## 6 Recent Developments

After the general election in 2018, the Latvian parliament failed to form a government. Due to the high number of parties present, a simple majority requires the coalition of at least four parties. Because it is frowned upon to govern together with the pro-Russian parties, the formation of the government always takes a long time. After the general election in October 2018, the prime minister was only appointed in January 2019. Therefore, Latvia was without a functioning government for this period of time. Furthermore, after a discussion about daylight-saving-time erupted at the beginning of this year. The government now backs an abolition of it [9]

## 7 References

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