



Country profile – LATVIA

NAME:	<i>conventional long form:</i> Republic of Latvia / Latvijas Republikas <i>conventional short form:</i> Latvia / Latvija
CAPITAL CITY:	Riga (Population 788 000)
POPULATION:	2 380 000 (2000 census, preliminary data)
AREA:	64 589 km ²
BOUNDARIES:	<i>Land boundaries:</i> Total 1 150 km <i>Border countries:</i> Belarus 141km, Estonia 339km, Lithuania 453km, Russia 217km <i>Coastline:</i> 531km
REGIONS ADMINISTRATIVE UNITS	26 districts (singulararajons), 7 municipalities and 483 parishes (pagasts)
ETHNIC GROUPS:	Latvian 56.5%, Russian 30.4%, Byelorussian,4.3%, Ukrainian 2.8%, Polish 2.6%, other 3.4%

GOVERNMENT

FORM OF GOVERNMENT

Republic - parliamentary democracy. Present constitution was adopted on 21 August 1991.

HEAD OF STATE

President (Vaira VIKE-FREIBERGA - elected 17 June 1999). The President is elected by the Parliament (Saeima) for a maximum of two consecutive four-year terms. The role is largely ceremonial, but the President holds considerable authority in foreign as well as domestic politics and is head of the armed forces. The President appoints the Prime Minister and can dissolve parliament subject to a referendum. The presidential veto of legislation can be overturned by a qualified majority in parliament.

PRIME MINISTER

Members of the Council of Ministers (cabinet) are nominated by the Prime Minister (currently Einaris Repse) and approved by parliament.

LEGISLATURE

Unicameral. The 100-member Saeima is elected by a proportional system (5% threshold) for a four-year term.

GOVERNMENT - ELECTIONS

Parliamentary elections took place in October 2002. The New Era party, led by Einaris Repse, emerged with most seats and formed a four-party coalition government with the For Fatherland and Freedom-Latvian National Independence Movement, the Union of Greens and Farmers and the First Party.

PARLIAMENT COMPOSITION: (2002 ELECTIONS)

PARTY	% OF VOTE	NO OF SEATS
New Era	23.93	26
Union "For Human Rights in A United Latvia	18.94	25
People's Party	16.71	20
Union of Greens and Farmers	9.47	12
Latvia's First' Party	9.58	10
For Fatherland and Freedom/LNNK	5.39	7

ECONOMY

Main Indicators of Economic Structure in 2001		
Population (average)	Thousand	2,355
GDP per head ^a	PPS	7,700
	per cent of EU average	33
Share of agriculture ^b in:		
- gross value added	per cent	4.7
- employment	per cent	15.1
Gross fixed capital formation/GDP	per cent	27.3
Gross foreign debt of the whole economy/GDP ^c	per cent	45.7
Exports of goods & services/GDP	per cent	44.9
Stock of foreign direct investment	Million €	2,284 ^c
	€ per head ^a	970
Long term unemployment rate	per cent of labour force	7.7

^a Figures have been calculated using the population figures from National Accounts, which may differ from those used in demographic statistics.

^b Agriculture, hunting, forestry and fishing.

^c Data refer to 2000.

Source: European Commission, Progress report , October 2002

EU RELATIONS

EUROPE AGREEMENT

Signed June 1995 In force since February 1998

APPLICATION DATE

27 October 1995

EUROPEAN COMMISSION REPORTS

[COM \(2002\) 700](#)

[COM \(2001\) 700](#)

[COM\(2000\) 706](#)

[COM\(1999\) 506,](#)

[COM\(1998\) 704](#)

EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT RESOLUTIONS ON EC REPORTS

[20.11.2002 \(A5-0371/2002\)](#)

[13.06.2002 \(A5-0190/2002\)](#)

[5.09.2001 \(A5-0252/2001\)](#)

[4.10.2000 \(A5-0239/2000\)](#)

[3.12.1998 \(A4-430/1998\)](#)

NEGOTIATIONS

Negotiations opened 28 March 2000. All 31 chapters closed (December 2002). Treaty of Accession signed on 16 April 2003.

PRE-ACCESSION FUNDING

These programmes concentrate assistance on the Accession Partnership priorities. In the years 2000-2002, total annual assistance to Latvia will amount to € 30 million (Phare), € 21.8 million (SAPARD) and between € 36.4 and 57.2 million (ISPA).

HISTORICAL AND POLITICAL BACKGROUND

EARLY HISTORY

The lands known today as Latvia have been inhabited since around 9000 BC. The Baltic tribes settled in this area in the first half of the second millenium BC. Specific tribal realms were formed between 900 AD and 1200 AD.

- 12th century: Arrival of German traders, crusaders and Christian missionaries. Riga was founded by the Germans in 1201.
- 13th to 16th centuries: A confederation known as Livonia developed in the 13th century and covered the territory of present-day Latvia and Estonia. Following the Livonian War of 1558-1583, Latvia came under Polish-Lithuania rule.
- 17th century: After the Polish-Swedish war of 1600- 1629, Riga and Vidzeme came under Swedish rule. National consolidation took place in the 17th century with the emergence of a culturally-unified nation speaking a common language.
- 18th century: Most of Latvia came under Russian domination in 1771, under the Treaty of Nystad, and the partitions of Poland added further territory to the Russian empire. With industrialisation at the end of the 18th century, Latvia became Russia's most developed province.

19TH CENTURY

Peasant revolts broke out in 1802 and 1840. Serfdom was abolished between 1817 and 1819. Nationalist sentiment grew throughout the 19th century. The first newspapers in Latvian were printed and there was considerable cultural activity. The *jaunlatviesi* or 'new Latvians' an intellectual movement was influential in the development of litterature and sciences in Latvia. The first all-Latvian song festival, an important cultural focus, was held in 1873.

20TH CENTURY

The Latvian independence movement, which began to develop at the end of the 19th century, gained momentum after the 1917 Russian revolution.

- 1905: The general strike throughout Russia was also observed in Latvia and there were violent clashes. Many were executed or forced into exile.

- 1918: Independence was proclaimed in November 1918. The international community recognised Latvia's independence in January 1921 and Latvia became a member of the League of Nations later the same year.
- 1934: President Karlis Ulmanis assumed dictatorial powers
- 1939-1945: The secret protocol of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact assigned the Baltic Republics to Moscow's sphere of influence. Soviet troops entered Latvia on 17 June 1940, and it was effectively annexed. In June 1941, many Latvians were deported to Siberia just before the advancing German army took control of the country the following month. During the occupation, most of the Jewish population were sent to concentration camps. The Soviet Army expelled the Nazi forces in 1944 and regained control.
- 1945-1989: In the immediate post-war period, many Latvians were imprisoned or deported and others fled to the West. Agriculture was collectivised and many of the Soviet Union's most advanced industrial structures were located in Latvia, leading to an influx of Russian workers. After the introduction of *Glasnost* and *Perestroika* in the mid-1980s, new organisations emerged, such as the Popular front of Latvia, the Movement for National Freedom and the Congress of Citizens of Latvia. Calls for independence grew and demonstrations were held from 1987 onwards.
- 1990: In the March elections to the Supreme Council, Popular Front candidates won a majority of seats and, in May, the Supreme Council adopted a declaration of independence with a transitional period.
- 1991: A referendum in March produced a large majority in favour of independence. The abortive coup against Mr Gorbachev in August acted as a final catalyst for Latvia's independence, which was formally recognised by the Soviet Union on 6 September 1991.

RECENT EVENTS

- 1993: First post-independence election was held in June, with Latvia's Way, a right-of-centre party, winning the largest number of seats. It formed a coalition with the Farmers' Union, and Valdis Birkavs became prime minister.
- 1994: Guntis Ulmanis was elected President of Latvia by the Saeima.
- 1995: Parliamentary elections in which four parties won a similar number of seats. Andris Skele became Prime Minister but, by mid-1997, he was forced to resign and Guntars Krast of the conservative For Fatherland and Freedom (TuB-LNNK) party took his place.
- 1998. Mr Skele's People's Party won most seats, but the government was formed by Latvia's Way, the New Party and members of TuB-LNNK with Vilis Kristopans as Prime Minister.
- 1999: Mr Skele formed a new government coalition of the People's Party, TuB-LNNK and Latvia's Way.
- 2000: A similar coalition government was formed, headed by Andris Berzins of Latvia's Way.
- 2002: In the October parliamentary elections, the New Era party led by Einars Repse won most votes and formed a four-party coalition government.
- 2003: In April, the EU Accession Treaty was signed.

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Useful links

European Commission

DG Enlargement - Latvia webpages

<http://www.europa.eu.int/comm/enlargement/latvia/index.htm>

EC Delegation in Latvia

<http://www.eiropainfo.lv/indexfla.htm>

Latvian Government

Foreign Ministry - 'Latvia and the EU'

<http://www.am.gov.lv/e/?id=13>

Latvian Parliament (Saeima)

<http://www.saeima.lv/Saeima99Eng.htm>

Media

Baltic Times (in English)

<http://www.baltictimes.com>

Latvian News Agency LETA (in English)

<http://www.leta2000.com/eng/default.asp>

BNS News Agency

<http://bnsnews.bns.lv/>

Search engines

<http://www.tvnet.lv/en/>

<http://www.latnet.lv/>

<http://www.all.lv/>