



U.S. DEPARTMENT of STATE

Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs
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Background Note: Latvia



PROFILE

OFFICIAL NAME:

[Republic of Latvia](#)

Geography

Area: 64,589 sq. km. (24,938 sq. mi.); slightly larger than West Virginia.

Cities (2006): *Capital*--Riga (727,578). *Other cities*--Daugavpils (109,482); Liepaja (85,915); Jelgava (66,087); Jurmala (55,602); Ventspils (43,806); Rezekne (36,646).

Terrain: Fertile low-lying plains predominate in central Latvia, highlands in Vidzeme and Latgale to the east, and hilly moraine in the western Kurzeme region. Forests cover one-third of the country, with over 3,000 small lakes and numerous bogs. Although there are more than 12,000 rivers in the country, the only major waterways are the Daugava (Dvina) River, which flows through the center of the country and empties into the Gulf of Riga, and the Gauja River, which rises in the Vidzeme Upland.

Land use: 20% arable land, 8% meadows and pastures, 45% forest and woodland, 27% other.

Climate: Temperate, maritime, with four seasons of almost equal length. Average temperatures in January range from -2.8°C (26.6°F) in the western, coastal town of Liepaja, to -6.6°C (20.1°F) in the inland town of Daugavpils. Mean temperatures for July range from 16.7°C (62.1°F) in Liepaja to 17.6°C (63.7°F) in Daugavpils. Annual precipitation averages 57 centimeters (23 in.).

People

Nationality: *Noun and adjective*--Latvian(s).

Population (2006): 2,294,590.

Annual growth rate (2006): -0.67% . *Birth rate*--9.24/1,000. *Death rate*--13.66/1,000. *Migration rate*--1,900 immigrants, 2,300 emigrants (2005). Net migration rate (2006): -2.26 migrant(s)/1,000.

Density (2006): 35.5/1 sq. km (2006) (this figure is far lower in parts of western Latvia). *Urban dwellers*--68%.

Major ethnic groups (2006): Latvians 59%, Russians 28.5%, Belarusians 3.8%, Ukrainians 2.5%, Poles 2.4%.

Religions: Lutheran, Roman Catholic, Russian Orthodox. No official figures are available on denomination size. A significant number of Latvians are thought to be non-believers.

State language: Latvian (Lettish). Russian also is spoken by most people.

Education: *Years compulsory*--9. By 1989, 60% of the adult populace had finished high school, and 12% had completed college. *Enrollment (2005/2006)*--416,221 students in 1, 570 schools (including pre-school establishments) and 131,125 university students. *Literacy*--99.8%.



Fireworks above Freedom's Monument in Riga, Latvia mark anniversary of Latvia's 1918 independence proclamation. November 18, 2002. [© AP Images]



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Health: *Infant mortality rate*--9.35/1,000 (2006). *Life expectancy (2006)*--66.08 yrs. male, 76.85 yrs. female. Work force (989,000 people): *Industry*--16.9%; *agriculture/forestry*--14.9%; *trade*--14.9%; *education*--8.9%; *transport/communications*--8.7%; *public administration/defense*--6.9%; *construction*--6.1%; *healthcare/social welfare*--6.1%.

Government

Type: Parliamentary democracy.

Constitution: The law "On the Republic of Latvia Status as a State," passed by Parliament on August 21, 1991, provided for the reinstatement of the 1922 constitution.

Branches: *Executive*--President (head of state), elected by Parliament every 4 years; Prime Minister (head of government). *Legislative*--Saeima (100-member parliament). *Judicial*--Supreme Court.

Administrative regions: 26 "rural" districts and 6 districts in Riga.

Principal political parties: People's Party--23 seats, Greens and Farmers--18 seats, New Era--18 Seats, Alliance of Political Organizations (Harmony Center)--17 seats, Latvia's First Party and Latvian /Latvia's Way Union--10 seats, Fatherland and Freedom--8 seats, For Human Rights in United Latvia--6 seats.

Suffrage: universal adult (18 years of age).

National holidays (2007): 1 January (New Year's Day); 6-9 April (Easter); 1 May (Labor Day); 23-24 June (Midsummer Festival); 18 November (National Day, proclamation of the Republic); 25-26 December (Christmas); 31 December (New Year's Eve).

Economy

GDP (2005): \$15.11 billion.

Annual growth rate (2005): 10.2%.

Annual inflation rate (2005): 7.0%.

Unemployment rate (2005): 7.2%.

Per capita Income (2005): \$6,587.

Natural resources: Peat, limestone, dolomite, gypsum, timber.

Agriculture/forestry (4.0% of GDP): *Products*--cattle, dairy foods, cereals, potatoes, timber. *Land*--2.48 million hectares, of which 75% is arable, 25% meadow and pasture.

Industry (13.1% of GDP): Metalworking, machinery and tools, light electrical equipment and fittings, textiles and footwear, technological instruments, construction materials, processed foods.

Major sectors of the economy: *Public services*--14.2%; *construction*--6.3%; *energy/water*--2.6%; *trade*--19.9%; *transport and communications*--15.0%; *business services*--13.2%; *financial services*--5.5%; *other services*--3.9%.

Trade (2005): *Exports*--\$4.87 billion: wood/wood products 24.8%; metals 13.1%, food/food products (including alcohol and tobacco) 12%, machines 9.3%, mineral products 9.2%, textiles 8.6%. *Major markets*--Lithuania 11%, Estonia 10.8%, Germany 10.2%, U.K. 10.1%, Russia 7.9%, Sweden 7.8%. *Imports*--\$8.2 billion: energy 15.5%, machinery 19.9%, chemicals 8.4%, food/food products 11.6%, metals 9.2%, vehicles 10.7%. *Partners*--Germany 14.0%, Lithuania 13.7, Russia 8.5%, Estonia 7.9%, Poland 6.4%, Finland 5.9%, Belarus 5.8%, Sweden 5.1%.

PEOPLE

The behavior of most Latvians reflects the strong cultural and religious influences of centuries-long Germanic and Scandinavian colonization and settlement. They are viewed as self-reliant, independent, persistent, and reserved. Eastern Latvia (Latgale), however, retains a strong Polish and Russian cultural and linguistic influence. This highly literate society places strong emphasis upon education, which is free and compulsory until age 16. Latvians are very tolerant of various religious denominations; in some cases, congregations from two or even three denominations make use of a single church. The majority of Latvians belong to the Evangelical Lutheran Church; a sizable minority is Russian Orthodox, and Eastern Latvia is predominantly Roman Catholic.

Historically, Latvia has always had fairly large Russian, Jewish, German, and Polish minorities, but postwar emigration, deportations, and Soviet Russification policies from 1939 to 1989 reduced the percentage of ethnic Latvians in Latvia from 73% to 52%. In an attempt to preserve the Latvian language and prevent ethnic Latvians from becoming a minority in their own country, Latvia enacted language, education, and citizenship laws which require capability in the Latvian language in order to become a citizen. Such legislation has caused concern among many non-citizen resident Russians, despite Latvian legal guarantees of universal human and civil rights regardless of citizenship.

Written with the Latin alphabet, Latvian is the language of the Latvian people and the official language of the country. It is an inflective language with several analytical forms, three dialects, and German syntactical influence. The oldest known examples of written Latvian are from a 1585 catechism. Latvians and Lithuanians are the only surviving direct descendents of the Baltic peoples who speak languages of the Indo-European family. While Latvia was a member of the U.S.S.R, Russian was the official language, so most Latvians also

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speak Russian, and the resident Slavic populace generally speaks Russian as a first language.

HISTORY

By the 10th century, the area that is today Latvia was inhabited by several Baltic tribes who had formed their own local governments. In 1054, German sailors who shipwrecked on the Daugava River inhabited the area, which initiated a period of increasing Germanic influence. The Germans named the territory Livonia. In 1201, Riga, the current capital of Latvia, was founded by the Germanic Bishop Alberth of Livonia; the city joined the Hanseatic League in 1285 and began to form important cultural and economic relationships with the rest of Europe. However, the new German nobility enserfed the indigenous people and accorded them only limited trading and property rights.

Subsequent wars and treaties led to Livonia's partition and colonization for centuries. In 1721 Russia took control over the Latvian territories as a result of its victory over Sweden in the Great Northern War. During this time there was little sense of a Latvian national identity, as both serfdom and institutional controls to migration and social mobility limited the boundaries of the indigenous people's intellectual and social geography. However, in the 1860's, the Young Latvian Movement was formed in order to promote the indigenous language against Russification policies and to publicize and counteract the socioeconomic oppression of Latvians, 60% of whom belonged to the landless, urban class. This growing proletariat became fertile ground for the ideas of western European socialism and supported the creation in 1903 of the Latvian Social Democratic Union (LSDU), which continued to champion national interests and Latvia's national self-determination, especially during the failed 1905 Revolution in Russia.

The onset of World War I brought German occupation of the western coastal province of Kurzeme, which Latvians heroically countered with several regiments of riflemen commanded by Czarist generals. The military campaign generally increased Latvian and LSDU support for the Bolsheviks' successful October Revolution in 1917, in the hopes of a "free Latvia within free Russia." These circumstances led to the formation of the Soviet "Iskolat Republic" in the unoccupied section of Latvia. In opposition to this government and to the landed barons' German sympathies stood the Latvian Provisional National Council and the Riga Democratic Bloc. These and other political parties formed the Latvian People's Council, which on November 18, 1918 declared Latvia's independence and formed an army. The new Latvian Army won a decisive battle over the combined German-Red Army forces and consolidated that success on the eastern Latgale front. These developments led to the dissolution of the Soviet Latvian government on January 13, 1920 and to a peace treaty between Latvia and Soviet Russia on August 11 later that year. On September 22, 1921, an independent Latvia was admitted to the League of Nations.

The government, headed by Prime Minister Ulmanis, declared a democratic, parliamentary republic. It recognized Latvian as the official language, granted cultural autonomy to the country's sizeable minorities, and introduced an electoral system into the Latvian constitution, which was adopted in 1922. The ensuing decade witnessed sweeping economic reform, as the war had devastated Latvian agriculture, and most Russian factories had been evacuated to Russia. However, economic depression heightened political turmoil, and, on May 15, 1934, the Prime Minister dismissed the Parliament, banned outspoken and left-wing political parties, and tightened authoritarian state control over Latvian social life and the economy.

The German-Soviet Nonaggression Pact of 1939 steadily forced Latvia under Soviet influence, culminating in Latvia's annexation by the Soviet Union on August 5, 1940. On June 14 of the following year, 15,000 Latvian citizens were forcibly deported and a large number of army officers shot. The subsequent German occupation witnessed the mobilization of many Latvians into Waffen SS legions, while some Latvians joined the Red Army and formed resistance groups, and others fled to the West and East. By 1945, Latvia's population had decreased by one-third.

After World War II, the U.S.S.R. subjected the Latvian republic to a social and economic reorganization which rapidly changed the rural economy to one based on heavy industry, transformed the predominantly Latvian population into a more multiethnic populace, and converted the peasant class into a fully urbanized industrial worker class. As part of the goal to more fully integrate Latvia into the Soviet Union, Stalin deported another 42,000 Latvians and continued to promote the policy of encouraging Soviet immigration to Latvia.

In July 1989, following the dramatic events in East Germany, the Latvian Supreme Soviet adopted a "Declaration of Sovereignty" and amended the Constitution to assert the supremacy of its laws over those of the U.S.S.R. Candidates from the pro-independence party Latvian Popular Front gained a two-thirds majority in the Supreme Council in the March 1990 democratic elections. On May 4, the Council declared its intention to restore full Latvian independence after a "transitional" period; three days later, a Latvian was chosen Prime Minister. Soviet political and military forces tried unsuccessfully to overthrow the Latvian government. On

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August 21, 1991, Latvia claimed de facto independence. International recognition, including that of the U.S.S.R., followed. The United States, which had never recognized Latvia's forcible annexation by the U.S.S.R., resumed full diplomatic relations with Latvia on September 2.

Since regaining its independence, Latvia has rapidly moved away from the political-economic structures and socio-cultural patterns which underlay the Soviet Union. Through a U.S. initiative, on April 30, 1994, Latvia and Russia signed a troop withdrawal agreement; Russia withdrew the bulk of its troops by August 31 of that year. Except for some large state-owned utilities, Latvia has privatized most sectors of its economy, which has become one of the fastest developing economies in Europe. Latvia has also maintained and strengthened the democratic, parliamentary republic that it revived in 1990.

Internationally, Latvia has accomplished a great deal. It became a member of the United Nations (UN) on September 18, 1991, and is a signatory to a number of UN organizations and other international agreements, including the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the World Bank. It is also a member of the Organization on Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and officially became a member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) on March 29, 2004. On May 1, 2004 Latvia joined the European Union (EU).

Since 2004, Latvia has emerged as a significant player in foreign affairs, standing out as a successful post-Soviet transition society. Strong memories of occupation and oppression motivate Latvia to reach out to countries struggling to move beyond authoritarian politics and state-controlled economies. It has worked closely with the U.S. and the EU to promote democracy in Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova, and Georgia. Latvia also supports pro-market, pro-free-trade policies in European and international organizations. It was the European Union's fastest growing economy in 2004 and 2005, and the European Commission forecast that it would be so again in 2006.

Latvia has developed a policy of international security cooperation through participation in crisis management and peacekeeping operations. In 2006, Latvia deployed over 10% of its active duty military to support UN, NATO, and coalition military operations. That percentage is well above the European average in terms of per capita contributions. In 2007, Latvia expects to nearly double its participation in the NATO International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan. It has also authorized the continued deployment of Latvian soldiers in Iraq through 2007. Closer to home, Latvia has been active in the Balkans: it supports the NATO mission in Kosovo with peacekeepers, and the European Union Force (EUFOR) mission in Bosnia with liaison officers. In November 2006, Latvia hosted a NATO Summit in its capital, Riga.

GOVERNMENT AND POLITICAL CONDITIONS

The highest organ of state authority in Latvia is the Saeima, a unicameral legislative body of 100 members who are elected by direct popular vote to serve four-year terms. The Saeima initiates and approves legislation sponsored by the Prime Minister. The Prime Minister is the head of government and has full responsibility and control over the Cabinet. The President, who is elected by the Saeima every four years, holds a primarily ceremonial role as head of state.

In the autumn of 1991 Latvia re-implemented significant portions of its 1922 constitution, and in the spring of 1993 the government took a census to determine eligibility for citizenship. Latvia finalized a citizenship and naturalization law in the summer of 1994, which was further liberalized in 1998. By law, those who were Latvian citizens in 1940 and their descendants (regardless of ethnicity) could claim citizenship. Forty-one percent of Latvia's population is ethnically non-Latvian, yet almost three-fourths of all residents are citizens of Latvia. Requirements for naturalization include a conversational knowledge of Latvian, a loyalty oath, renunciation of former citizenship, 5 years of residency in Latvia, and a basic knowledge of Latvian history. Dual citizenship is allowed for those who were forced to leave Latvia during the Soviet occupation and adopted another citizenship. Convicted criminals, agents of Soviet intelligence services, and certain other groups are excluded from becoming citizens.

On March 19, 1991 the Supreme Council passed a law explicitly guaranteeing "equal rights to all nationalities and ethnic groups" and "to all permanent residents in the Republic regardless of their nationality, equal rights to work and wages." In addition, the law prohibits "any activity directed toward nationality discrimination or the promotion of national superiority or hatred."

In the June 5-6, 1993 elections, in which more than 90% of the electorate participated, eight of Latvia's 23 registered political parties passed the 5% threshold to enter parliament. The centrist party Latvia's Way received a 33% plurality of votes and joined the Farmer's Union to head a center-right-wing coalition government.

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The September 30-October 1, 1995 elections resulted in a deeply fragmented parliament with nine parties represented and the largest party commanding only 18 of 100 seats. Attempts to form right-of-center and leftist governments failed; seven weeks after the election, a broad but fractious coalition government of six of the nine parties was voted into office under Prime Minister Andris Skele, a popular, nonpartisan businessman.

In the 1998 elections, the Latvian party structure began to consolidate, with only six parties obtaining seats in the Saeima. Andris Skele's newly formed People's Party garnered a plurality with 24 seats. Though the election represented a victory for the center-right, personality conflicts and scandals within the two largest right-of-center parties--Latvia's Way and the People's Party--prevented stable coalitions from forming. Two shaky governments quickly collapsed in less than a year. In May 2000, a compromise candidate was found in the Latvia's Way mayor of Riga, Andris Berzins. His four-party coalition lasted until parliamentary elections in October 2002. Those elections left Latvia's Way, for the first time since 1993, with no seats in parliament. The New Era Party, which ran on an anti-corruption platform, gained the most seats and formed a four-party coalition government until the abrupt resignation of the Prime Minister in February 2004 over issues relating to personalities and management of the ruling coalition.

With the tacit support of leftist parties, a minority government led by Greens and Farmers Union leader Indulis Emsis took office on March 9, 2004. The new government focused on smoothing Latvia's entry into NATO and the European Union, which took place in the first half of 2004. The government collapsed on October 28, 2004 after parliament voted against the 2005 budget. A new coalition government, led by Prime Minister Aigars Kalvitis, took office on December 2, 2004 and was re-elected on October 7, 2006. These last election results mark the first time that an incumbent administration has won re-election since Latvia's independence from the Soviet Union.

In 1999, the Saeima elected Vaira Vike-Freiberga, a compromise candidate with no party affiliation, to the presidency. Though born in Riga in 1937, she settled in Canada during the years of the Soviet occupation, becoming a well-respected academic on the subject of Latvian culture and psychology. Since her election, she has become one of the most popular political figures in Latvia. She was overwhelmingly re-elected by parliament for another four-year term in June 2003.

Latvia's flag consists of two horizontal, maroon bands of equal width, divided by a white stripe one-half the width. The national holiday is November 18, Independence Day.

Principal Government Officials

President--Vaira Vike-Freiberga
 Prime Minister--Aigars Kalvitis, People's Party
 Minister of Defense--Atis Slakteris, People's Party
 Minister of Foreign Affairs--Artis Pabriks, People's Party
 Minister of Economy--Juris Strods, Fatherland and Freedom
 Minister of Interior--Ivars Godmanis, Latvia's Way
 Minister of Education and Science--Baiba Rivza, Greens and Farmers Union
 Minister of Agriculture--Martins Roze, Greens and Farmers Union
 Minister of Welfare--Dagnija Stake, Greens and Farmers Union
 Minister of Justice--Gaidis Berzins, Fatherland and Freedom
 Minister of Culture--Helena Demakova, People's Party
 Minister of Finance--Oskars Spurdzins, People's Party
 Minister of Environment--Raimonds Vejonis, Greens and Farmers Union
 Minister of Health--Gundars Berzins, People's Party
 Minister of Transport--Ainars Slesers, Latvia's First Party
 Minister of Children and Family Affairs--Ainars Bastiks, Latvia's First Party
 Special Task Minister of e-Affairs--Ina Gudele, Independent
 Minister for Regional Development and Local Governments--Aigars Stokenbergs, People's Party
 Special Task Minister for Society Integration Affairs--Oskars Kastens, Latvia's First Party
 Special Task Minister for Administration of EU funds--Normunds Broks, Fatherland and Freedom
 Ambassador to the United States--Maris Riekstins

Latvia maintains an [embassy](#) in the United States at 2306 Massachusetts Ave NW, Washington DC 20008 [tel: (202) 328-2840].

ECONOMY

For centuries under Hanseatic and German influence and then during its inter-war independence, Latvia used its geographic location as an important East-West commercial and trading center. Industry served local markets, while timber, paper, and agricultural products supplied Latvia's main exports. The years of Soviet

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occupation tended to integrate Latvia's economy into the U.S.S.R. in order to serve that empire's large internal industrial needs. Since reestablishing its independence, Latvia has proceeded with market-oriented reforms. Its freely traded currency, the Lat, was introduced in 1993 and has held steady or appreciated against major world currencies. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has noted that Latvia's economic performance the past several years has been among the best of the EU accession countries. Real per capita GDP has roughly doubled compared to its 1995 level. GDP grew by close to 11% in 2006 and annual growth rates of 6-8% in the medium term are predicted by the Latvian government. Inflation, however, has remained high, at 6-7%, since 2004, following a period from 1999 to 2003 when Latvian inflation rates were at 3% or below. The increase in inflation has delayed prospects of introducing the Euro currency in Latvia. At the same time, Latvia's current account deficit (ranging from 12% to 14% of GDP over the past 3 years) remains one of the key vulnerabilities of the Latvian economy.

Independence forced Latvia into a precarious position regarding its energy supply. With the exception of peat and timber, Latvia had no significant domestic energy resources and received 93% of its imported energy from Soviet republics. With the goal of increasing its security, Latvia has been devising ways to diversify its energy sources and to increase energy conservation. In August 2001, the Kegums hydroelectric power plant was reopened, contributing to Latvia's ability to supply 25% of its energy that year. Furthermore, in June 2002 the European Investment Bank loaned Latvenergo, a state-owned energy supply group, 80 million Euros to modernize its generation and distribution of electricity and thermal energy. Latvia is also looking to regional cooperation arrangements to diversify its energy supplies. With the other Baltic states, it plans to create an electricity network able to operate independently of its Russian counterpart. It is planning major infrastructure projects to provide energy supplies via Scandinavia, and it is working with Estonia, Lithuania and Poland to build a new nuclear power station in Ignalina, Lithuania.

Privatization in Latvia is almost complete. All of the previously state-owned small and medium enterprises have been privatized, leaving in state hands the electric utility, the Latvian railway company, and the Latvian postal system, as well as state shares in several politically sensitive concerns. Despite the lack of transparency of the early stages of the privatization process and certain difficulties in privatization of some of the largest companies, Latvian privatization efforts have led to the development of a dynamic and prosperous private sector, which accounts for approximately 70% of the country's GDP.

In the last few years, Latvia has implemented many positive reforms in the business sphere (ranking 24th worldwide on the ease of doing business there, according to the World Bank *Doing Business 2007* report). Most reforms deal with licensing, taxes, and business closures. In the 2005/2006 period, Latvia made it easier for businesses to comply with building requirements and reduced the number of licenses and permits required. In addition, Latvia launched an electronic tax filing system and improved the regulation of bankruptcy administrators in order to reduce corruption.

Foreign investment in Latvia remains high, as both Western and Eastern investors are trying to establish a foothold in the new EU member state as well as to take advantage of Latvia's stable macroeconomic environment, central location in the region, and cheap labor. Representing 5.8% of Latvia's total foreign direct investment, the U.S. FDI stock in Latvia stood at \$359 million at the end of the 2nd quarter of 2006. In 2005, U.S. goods and services accounted for 1.0% of Latvia's total imports, while exports to the United States accounted for 2.7% of Latvia's total exports. Latvia has been a member of the World Trade Organization since 1999. Latvia and the United States have signed treaties on investment, trade, intellectual property protection, and avoidance of double taxation.

In the long term, continued high economic growth in Latvia will depend on further improvements to the business environment, particularly the drive to reduce corruption and strengthen the rule of law, and on Latvia's ability to use the opportunities presented by EU membership.

DEFENSE

Latvia's defense concept is based upon four basic pillars: collective defense as a member of NATO, professionalization of the armed forces, support and coordination with civil society, and international military cooperation. The armed forces consist of the land forces brigade with one deployable battalion, an air force focused on air surveillance and search and rescue, and naval forces focused on coastal surveillance, assertion of sovereignty, mine countermeasures, search and rescue, and environmental protection. The land forces, air force, and navy comprise approximately 7,000 personnel. There is also a "zemessardze," or home guard, an autonomous 13,890-man-strong volunteer reserve organization which performs traditional national-guard duties such as crisis response and support for military operations. The Latvian National Armed Forces became fully professional in November 2006. Defense spending has risen in recent years, and the government has committed 2% of its GDP to defense spending through 2013.

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FOREIGN RELATIONS

After regaining its independence, Latvia began to work at reintegrating into the West. In 1991, Latvia joined the Organization on Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and became a member of the United Nations (UN). It is party to a number of UN organizations as well as other international agreements including the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the World Bank. Since 2004, Latvia has been an active member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the European Union (EU).

Latvia has emerged as a significant international player, courageously supporting peace and democracy worldwide. Per capita, it is one of the largest contributors to international military operations. It has deployed troops to Iraq, Afghanistan, and the Balkans. It also works closely with the U.S. and the EU to support and promote democracy in the former Soviet Union states of Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova, and Georgia. A testament to the close relationship between the U.S. and Latvia is the fact that President Bush has visited the country twice, the second time to attend the NATO Summit held in Riga on November 28-29, 2006.

Russia has expressed concern over how Latvia's language and naturalization laws affect Latvia's Russian-speaking population. Russians comprised 28.5% of the population in 2006. In turn, Latvia is interested in the welfare of ethnic Latvians still residing in Russia.

Latvia maintains embassies in the United States, Austria, Belarus, Belgium, Canada, the People's Republic of China, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Israel, Italy, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Russia, South Africa, Sweden, Ukraine, the United Kingdom, and Uzbekistan. It also operates missions to the United Nations in New York City and Geneva, the European Council, the European Union, the Chemical Weapons Nonproliferation Organization, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, the World Trade Organization, and the UN Council on Food and Agriculture. It is also represented at NATO.

Latvia has a Consulate General in Russia; Consulates in Belarus and Russia; Honorary Consulates General in Australia, Cyprus, India, Israel, and Norway; and Honorary Consulates in Argentina, Australia, Austria, Belarus, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Cyprus, Denmark, Egypt, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Lebanon, Luxembourg, Mexico, Moldova, Netherlands, Norway, Pakistan, Philippines, Poland, Singapore, South Africa, South Korea, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Thailand, Turkey, and Venezuela.

U.S.-LATVIAN RELATIONS

The United States established diplomatic relations with Latvia on July 28, 1922. The U.S. Legation in Riga was officially established on November 13, 1922 and served as the headquarters for U.S. representation in the Baltics during the interwar era. The Soviet invasion forced the closure of the legation on September 5, 1940, but Latvian representation in the United States has continued uninterrupted for more than 80 years. The United States never recognized the forcible incorporation of Latvia into the U.S.S.R. and views the present Government of Latvia as a legal continuation of the interwar republic.

Latvia and the United States have signed treaties on investment, trade, intellectual property protection, and avoidance of double taxation. Latvia has enjoyed most-favored-nation treatment with the United States since December 1991.

Principal U.S. Embassy Officials

Ambassador--[Catherine Todd Bailey](#)
Deputy Chief of Mission--Phillip Antweiler
Political/Economic Officer--Tamir Waser
Management Officer--Mary Teirlynck
Consular Officer--Stephen T. Frahm
Public Affairs Officer--Raymond Stephens, Acting
Defense Attaché--Lt. Col. David Holahan

The [U.S. Embassy](#) in Latvia is located at Raina Boulevard 7, Riga [tel. (371) 703-6200].

TRAVEL AND BUSINESS INFORMATION

The U.S. Department of State's Consular Information Program advises Americans traveling and residing abroad through Consular Information Sheets, Public Announcements, and Travel Warnings. **Consular Information Sheets** exist for all countries and include information on entry and exit requirements, currency regulations, health conditions, safety and security, crime, political disturbances, and the addresses of the U.S. embassies

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and consulates abroad. **Public Announcements** are issued to disseminate information quickly about terrorist threats and other relatively short-term conditions overseas that pose significant risks to the security of American travelers. **Travel Warnings** are issued when the State Department recommends that Americans avoid travel to a certain country because the situation is dangerous or unstable.

For the latest security information, Americans living and traveling abroad should regularly monitor the Department's Bureau of Consular Affairs Internet web site at <http://www.travel.state.gov>, where the current [Worldwide Caution](#), [Public Announcements](#), and [Travel Warnings](#) can be found. [Consular Affairs Publications](#), which contain information on obtaining passports and planning a safe trip abroad, are also available at <http://www.travel.state.gov>. For additional information on international travel, see <http://www.usa.gov/Citizen/Topics/Travel/International.shtml>.

The Department of State encourages all U.S. citizens who traveling or residing abroad to register via the [State Department's travel registration](#) website or at the nearest U.S. embassy or consulate abroad. Registration will make your presence and whereabouts known in case it is necessary to contact you in an emergency and will enable you to receive up-to-date information on security conditions.

Emergency information concerning Americans traveling abroad may be obtained by calling 1-888-407-4747 toll free in the U.S. and Canada or the regular toll line 1-202-501-4444 for callers outside the U.S. and Canada.

The National Passport Information Center (NPIC) is the U.S. Department of State's single, centralized public contact center for U.S. passport information. Telephone: 1-877-4USA-PPT (1-877-487-2778). Customer service representatives and operators for TDD/TTY are available Monday-Friday, 7:00 a.m. to 12:00 midnight, Eastern Time, excluding federal holidays.

Travelers can check the latest health information with the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta, Georgia. A hotline at 877-FYI-TRIP (877-394-8747) and a web site at <http://www.cdc.gov/travel/index.htm> give the most recent health advisories, immunization recommendations or requirements, and advice on food and drinking water safety for regions and countries. A booklet entitled "Health Information for International Travel" (HHS publication number CDC-95-8280) is available from the U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, DC 20402, tel. (202) 512-1800.

Further Electronic Information

Department of State Web Site. Available on the Internet at <http://www.state.gov>, the Department of State web site provides timely, global access to official U.S. foreign policy information, including [Background Notes](#) and [daily press briefings](#) along with the directory of [key officers](#) of Foreign Service posts and more. The Overseas Security Advisory Council (OSAC) provides security information and regional news that impact U.S. companies working abroad through its website <http://www.osac.gov>

[Export.gov](#) provides a portal to all export-related assistance and market information offered by the federal government and provides trade leads, free export counseling, help with the export process, and more.

[STAT-USA/Internet](#), a service of the U.S. Department of Commerce, provides authoritative economic, business, and international trade information from the Federal government. The site includes current and historical trade-related releases, international market research, trade opportunities, and country analysis and provides access to the [National Trade Data Bank](#).