

LATVIA



Latvia is a strong and reliable transatlantic partner in advancing peace, stability, and democracy in Europe and beyond. Latvia is playing a key role in Coalition operations, providing important public, diplomatic, and military support. It has troops deployed to two separate missions in Afghanistan and participates in peacekeeping operations in the Balkans. U.S. assistance to Latvia sustains and expands a strong partnership, supports Latvia's commitment to ongoing activities in Afghanistan, and supports the development of niche capabilities required by NATO.

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 world-wide. Per capita, it is one of the largest contributors to international military operations. It has deployed troops to Iraq, Afghanistan, Georgia, 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 George W. Bush 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% of the population in 2008. In turn, Latvia is interested in the welfare of ethnic Latvians still residing in Russia. Latvia and Russia signed a border treaty agreement in March 2007. It was ratified by both sides and went into effect at the end of 2007.

Latvia maintains embassies in the United States, Austria, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Belgium, Canada, the People's Republic of China, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Egypt, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Georgia, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Kazakhstan, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Russia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Turkey, 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, NATO, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, the World Trade Organization, UNESCO, and the UN Council on Food and Agriculture.

Latvia has a Consulate General in Russia; Consulates in Belarus and Russia; Honorary Consulates General in Brazil, Denmark, Italy, Cyprus, Lebanon, Norway, Sri Lanka, Turkey, and Venezuela; and Honorary Consulates in USA, Argentina, Armenia, Australia, Austria,, Belgium, Bulgaria, Canada, Chile, Columbia, Croatia, Cyprus, Denmark, Dominican Republic, Egypt, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Hong Kong, Iceland, India, Indonesia Ireland, Israel, Italy, Jamaica, Japan, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Luxembourg, Malta, Morocco, Macedonia, Mexico, Moldova, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Pakistan, Panama, Peru, Philippines, Poland, Portugal, San Marino, South Africa, South Korea, Spain, Syria, Sweden, Switzerland, Thailand, Tunisia, Turkey, Ukraine, and the United Kingdom.

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 since 1922. 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, extradition, mutual legal assistance, and avoidance of double taxation. Latvia has enjoyed most-favored-nation treatment with the United States since December 1991. In 2008, Latvia joined the visa waiver program.

Peace and Security: U.S. assistance to Latvia provides a significant return on investment by maintaining strong political support for Coalition operations and a willingness to provide personnel, equipment, and associated support. The priority for U.S. assistance to Latvia is continued support for the professional development of the Latvian Armed Forces, Ministry of Defense, and border security forces. These efforts will ensure Latvia's continued participation in Coalition operations and strengthen the capabilities of its forces to counter terrorism. In FY 2010, U.S. training assistance will assist the Latvian Armed Forces to improve its professionalization, with emphasis on non-commissioned officer leadership, staff planning, and specialty skill training, along with advanced officer training in niche specialties. These programs will be implemented through the U.S. Department of Defense.

Focus on Performance: By helping Latvia reform its defense forces, the U.S. seeks to ensure that Latvia continues to support key Euro-Atlantic security goals that are in line with U.S. interests and which also strengthen Latvia's expeditionary capability. U.S. assistance promotes professionalism, particularly among the Non-Commissioned Officer Corps, which allows Latvia to deploy troops possessing the skills necessary for coalition warfare. Latvia has demonstrated tremendous potential and willingness in this regard, rotating more than 10 percent of the active-duty Land Forces through deployments to Iraq and with a joint Latvian-U.S. Operational Mentoring and Liaison Team in Afghanistan, and participating in peacekeeping missions in Kosovo and Bosnia. Latvia deployed 20 soldiers in support of Kosovo Forces (KFOR) operations and 130 soldiers in support of International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) operations in Afghanistan. The Afghanistan deployment included the first deployment of a combined Latvian and Michigan National Guard Operational Mentoring and Liaison Team (OMLT). Additional funding will aid Latvian continued support for its OMLT and coalition operations in Afghanistan, and for Latvia to successfully meet NRF 14 Baltic Battalion commitments.