



W E L C O M E T O

LATVIA



The European Policies of the EU Member-State : Latvia

INTRODUCTION

Since its accession in 2004 during the great wave of enlargement, Latvia has demonstrated remarkable integration

:

- presidency of the EU Council in 2015
 - role as the host of **BEREC**
(Body of European Regulators for Electronic Communications)
- membership of the Schengen area and the euro zone

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I. Factors influencing Latvia's European policies



1. Place on the map

Latvia is a small country of approximately 64,600 square meter in northern Europe, bordered by :

- Estonia
- Lithuania
- Russia
- Belarus
- Sweden

Geographical position places it at the crossroads between Western Europe and the post-Soviet area.

Complex relations with Russia : marked by a history of Soviet domination and, more recently, heightened security concerns due to the conflict between Russia and Ukraine.

I. Factors influencing Latvia's European policies

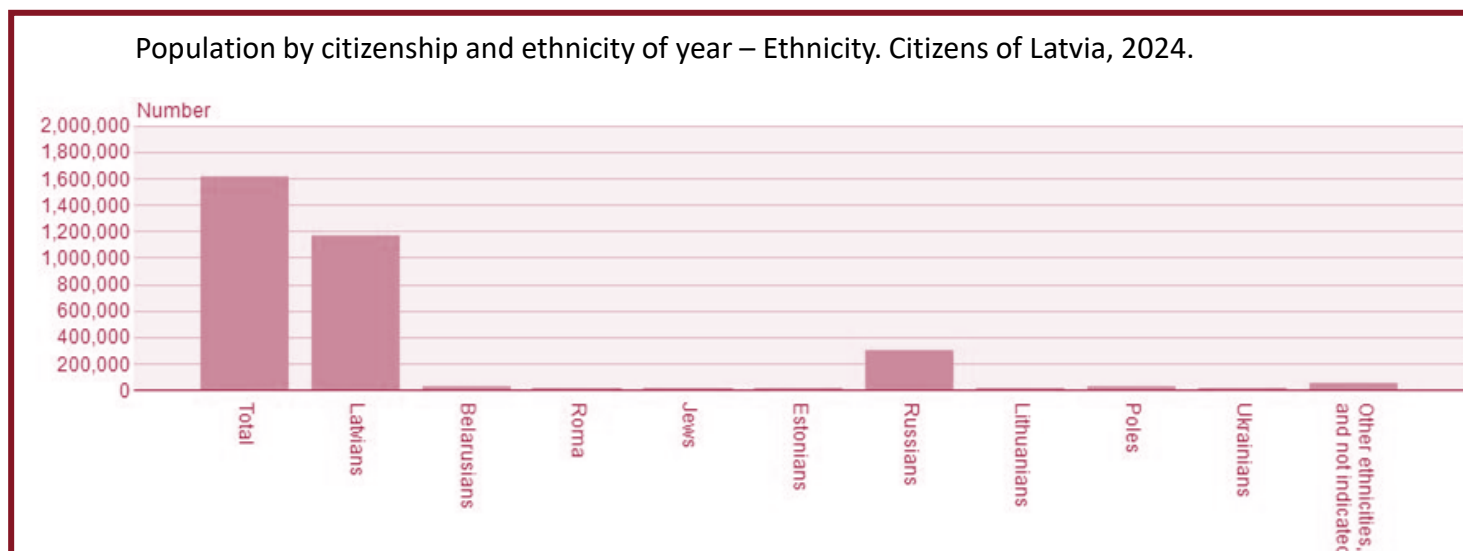
2. A small and diverse population

With around 1.9 million inhabitants, Latvia is one of the smallest countries in the European Union, representing only 0.4% of the total EU population.

Population is marked by great diversity :

- almost a third of the population is of Russian origin
- 35% still speak Russian

But division of the population due to Latvian government decisions.



I. Factors influencing Latvia's European policies

3. A turbulent history

Latvian territory was marked by a succession of occupations by Germany and Russia :

- **18th** : Russian control after being disputed by Poland and Sweden
- **1941** : German control
- **End of Second World War** : became a part of the USSR and beginning of the russification
- **First World War** : occupation by Germany
- **1936** : first independence under an authoritarian regime
- **1988** : new political parties other than the communist one
- **1940** : annexation by the USSR
- **1991** : collapse of the Soviet Union and proclaim of independence



I. Factors influencing Latvia's European policies

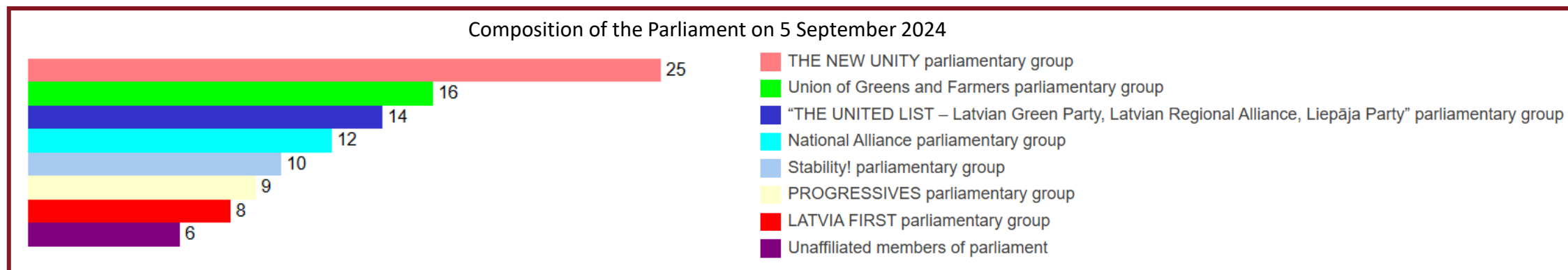
4. The political system

The current government is a coalition, led by Evika Siliņa, and brings together several parties :

- the centre-right (**The New Unity**)
 - European People's Party
- the ecologists (**Union of Greens and Farmers**)
 - Without affiliation
- the social democrats (**Progressives**)
 - European Green Party



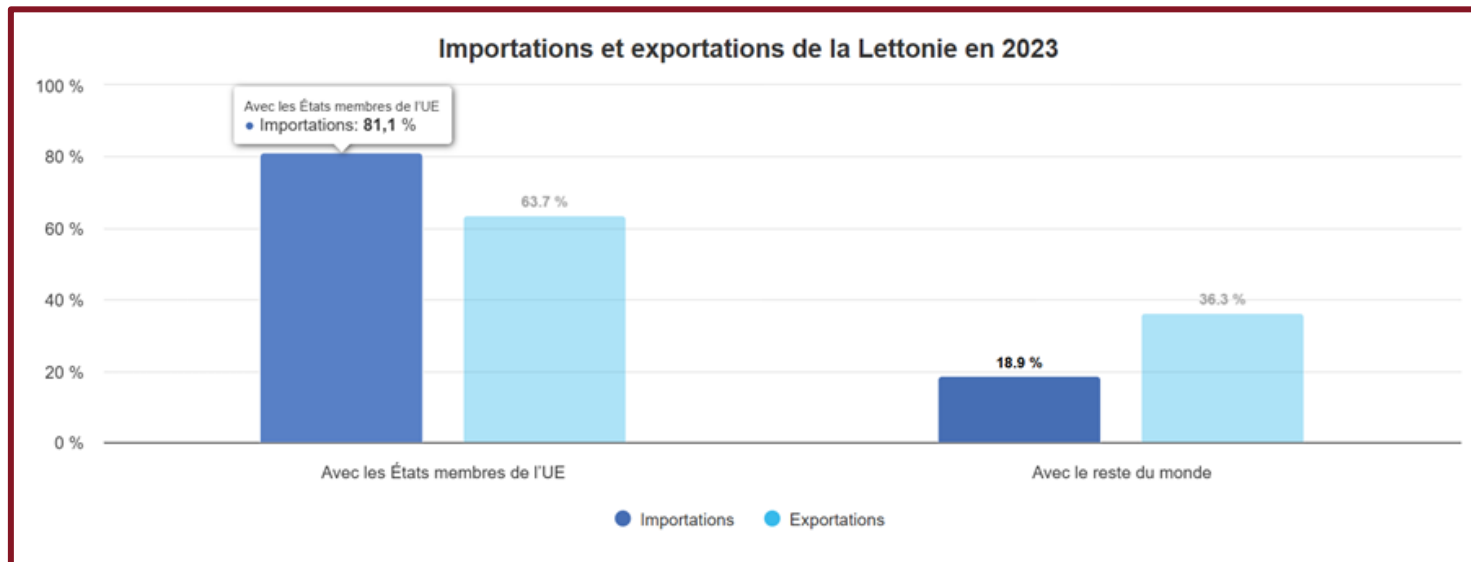
The President of the Republic is Edgars Rinkēvičs but he has a largely symbolic role.



I. Factors influencing Latvia's European policies

5. Trade and economic integration

- The EU is Latvia's largest trading partner.
- Its position acting as a strategic transit point between Europe and Russia, and more broadly Asia.
- Latvia's GDP amounts to 40 billion represents only 0.26% of the total EU GDP.



This graph shows Latvia's trade activity in 2023. A significant majority of imports (81.1%) and exports (63.7%) involve EU member states. On the other hand, trade with the rest of the world represents only 18.9% of imports and 36.3% of exports.

II. Latvia's ambitions within the European Union

1. Integration motivated by security

In 1991 Latvia had three choices:

- reintegrate with the East
- become neutral
- move towards the West

Joining the European Union was above all a strategic decision to guarantee its sovereignty and security



2. A revitalized economy thanks to the EU

Latvia also viewed EU membership as a necessary means of revitalizing its economy after the economic instability of the early 1990s.

II. Latvia's ambitions within the European Union

3. Political reforms and cultural roots

To meet the criteria for EU membership, Latvia had to implement major reforms:

- Strengthening the rule of law
- Fighting corruption
- Consolidation of democratic institutions.



4. Ambitions for the future of the EU

Latvia aspires to a European Union that strengthens:

- collective security
- energy independence
- economic integration
- respect national sovereignty
- equality between Member States

III. Responses to European crises

1. The eurozone crises

- In 2009, Latvia GDP fell by almost 18%, reflecting the structural vulnerability of a country strongly dependent on foreign investment and foreign trade.
- Assistance from the International Monetary Fund with a rescue plan of 7.5 billion euros and the recommendation of a currency devaluation.



In response, the government choose to begin a severe austerity program including public spending cuts, wage reductions, and tax increases.

Recovery was driven by :

- strategic exports
- solid trade relations into Baltic countries

In 2011 and 2012, GDP was growing by 5.5% and 5.6% which allowed Latvia to repay the money lent to the IMF three years early.

III. Responses to European crises

2. The war in Ukraine

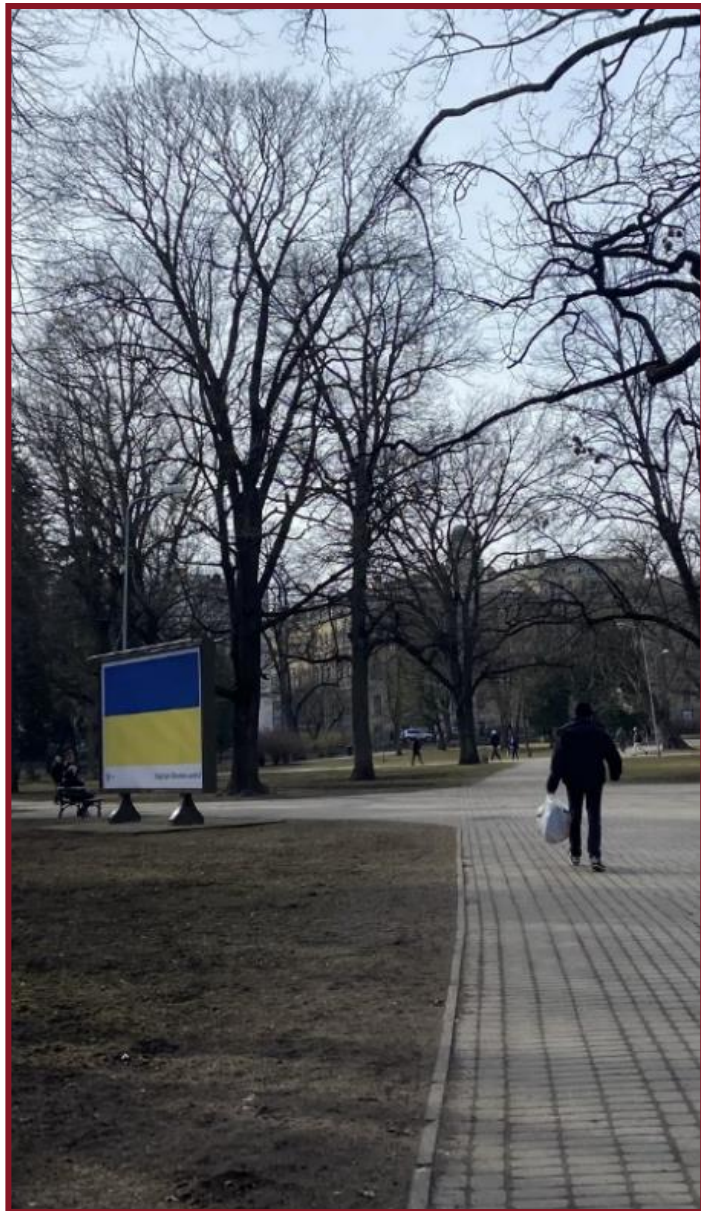
Latvia sees this conflict as a direct threat to its own security :

- reintroducing of compulsory military service
- strengthening its military competences
- increasing its defense budget to 3% of GDP by 2027

One of the most committed European allies alongside Ukraine :

- providing aid amounting to 0.25% of its GDP
- actively participating in cyber security and mine-clearing
- actively lobbies for the strengthening of sanctions against Russia
- supports the granting of EU candidate status to Ukraine and Moldova





III. Responses to European crises

3. Euroscepticism

Around 76% of Latvians believing that the country is better off within the EU but a certain form of euroscepticism persists.

This scepticism is marked among :

- the Russian-speaking minority
- some political parties

These criticisms remain marginal, and general public opinion, deeply marked by the Soviet past, continues to regard the EU as an essential guarantor of stability and prosperity.



In 2024, 85% of Latvians support the European Economic and Monetary Union with a single currency which reflect the overall positive stance towards European integration.

Thank you for your attention!