

A large, stylized blue laurel wreath is positioned on the left side of the cover, curving upwards and then downwards towards the bottom right.

KASPARS ĢĒRMANIS

Latvia

A red swoosh underline is positioned beneath the word "Latvia".

at the UN:

From Aid Recipient to Contributor



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Latvia at the UN: From Aid Recipient to Contributor

This publication reviews three decades of Latvia's membership in the United Nations (UN), during which Latvia has gradually matured and transformed from an aid recipient to a contributor within the organization and beyond. It traces Latvia's journey in the UN from its accession in 1991 to 2025, when Latvia was elected to the UN Security Council.

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List of Abbreviations

BATUN – Baltic Appeal to the United Nations

IAEA – International Atomic Energy Agency

ICC – International Criminal Court

IOM – International Organization for Migration

MINUSMA – United Nations Multidimensional Integrated
Stabilization Mission in Mali

UNDOF – United Nations Disengagement Observer Force

UNDP – United Nations Development Program

UNESCO – United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural
Organization

UNFPA – United Nations Population Fund

UNHCR – United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

UNICEF – United Nations International Children’s Emergency
Fund

UNIFIL – United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon

UN OCHA – United Nations Office for the Coordination of
Humanitarian Affairs

UNTSO – United Nations Truce Supervision Organization

WFP – World Food Program

WHO – World Health Organization

WTO – World Trade Organization

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Introduction: Latvia's Membership in the UN as Circular Symbolism

It is hard not to notice the circular symbolism. By joining the United Nations (UN) in September 1991, Latvia became a full-fledged participant in international politics again. Moreover, the UN played a crucial role in mounting pressure on Russia to withdraw its troops from the Baltic States, a remnant of the occupying power – the Soviet Union. Involvement in the UN helped to pave the way for participation in many other organizations, including the most significant in terms of economy and security, the European Union (EU) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), respectively. Membership in the UN strengthened Latvia's statehood and engagement in global affairs.

Over the past three decades, Latvia has gained substantial experience at the UN. Latvian representatives have held or run for significant positions, promoted meaningful initiatives, and drawn attention to global issues. This experience empowers Latvia to advocate not only for itself but also for others. Latvia is now standing up for Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity while simultaneously reinforcing its own.

As a culmination of Latvia's more than three decades in the UN, on June 3, 2025, Latvia was elected to the UN Security

Council with an impressive 178 votes.¹ Following Montenegro's withdrawal from the election race in January 2025, Latvia remained the sole candidate from the Eastern European Group.

But there is no time for celebration – hard work lies ahead. The largest war since the end of World War II is ongoing in Europe. Not only Russia's war against Ukraine, but also other wars and global issues will concern the UN Security Council and the UN at large.

Although the UN has faced significant criticism, it remains a unique global forum for building trust and an irreplaceable instrument in assisting the most vulnerable during wars, famines, epidemics, catastrophes, and other misfortunes.

The UN is not the first attempt to create a global forum aimed at fostering peace and security worldwide. Its predecessor, the League of Nations during the inter-war period, was the initial effort. It failed to prevent World War II and, consequently, the occupation of Latvia by both the Nazis and Soviets. Notably, Latvia was a member of the League of Nations and even held a non-permanent seat on the Council of the League, the equivalent of the UN Security Council, from 1936 to 1939.

Multiple authors have already explored Latvia's experience at the UN. It has been discussed in publications by, among others Indāns and Gregors², Bukovskis³, Pāvils⁴, and Reire⁵. This report

¹ United Nations (2025). *Five countries elected to serve on UN Security Council*. 03.06.2025. <https://news.un.org/en/story/2025/06/1163971>

² Indāns, I. and Gregors, R. V. (1999). *Latvijas ārpolitika ANO ietvaros*. Latvijas Ārpolitikas institūts.

³ Bukovskis, K. (2020). *Latvijas intereses un iespējas Apvienoto Nāciju Organizācijas Drošības padomes nepastāvīgās dalībvalsts statusā*. Latvijas Ārpolitikas institūts. <https://www.lai.lv/publikacijas/latvijas-intereses-un-iespejas-apvienoto-naciju-organizacijas-drosibas-padomes-nepastavigas-dalibval-873>

⁴ Pāvils, L. (2021). *Latvija nostiprina pozīcijas*. Jurista vārds. <https://juristavards.lv/zurnals/279669-latvija-nostiprina-pozicijas/>

⁵ Reire, G. (2010). *Apvienoto Nāciju Organizācijas nozīme starptautiskā miera un drošības uzturēšanā*. Doctoral thesis. University of Latvia, Faculty of Social Sciences; Reire, G. (Ed.) (2024). *Latvija Apvienotajās Nācijās*. Zinātne.

complements the previous studies. It aims to review Latvia's journey and development within the UN, transitioning from a recipient to a provider, how the UN has influenced legislation across various sectors, modernizing the approach in various areas, and what still needs to be addressed. This report also seeks to outline and analyze Latvia's objectives in the UN for the coming years.

Finally, the Center for Geopolitical Studies Riga is grateful to the experts from the diplomatic corps and others who have agreed to share their insights on Latvia's experience at the UN. They include Baiba Braže, Ilze Doškina, Jānis Kārkliņš, Kristofers Krūmiņš, Jānis Mažeiks, Baiba Moļņika, Sanita Pavļuta-Deslandes, Andrejs Pildegovičs, Ivars Pundurs, Elina Šteinerte, Zinta Zommers, Ilze Žilde and one person who preferred to stay anonymous.

1. Returning to International Politics and Joining the UN

When Latvia regained its independence in August 1991, it needed to consolidate the state and strengthen its international position. During World War II, Latvia was occupied not only by the Soviet Union but also briefly by the Nazi Germany. Until 1991, Latvia had to endure five decades of Soviet occupation. Restoring Latvia's sovereignty required global recognition, cemented in international law, agreements, and treaties.

Latvia's interests and priorities align with the core mission of the UN – upholding world peace, or, more precisely, safeguarding the security of the country and region. The organization, founded almost 80 years ago, aims to maintain global security by preventing acts of aggression and adhering to principles of justice and international law.⁶

Latvia, as a nation that has endured the loss of independence and the cruelty of totalitarian regimes, including the Holocaust and mass deportations to Siberia, is among the advocates for the UN, human rights, and an international rules-based order.

⁶ United Nations (1945). *United Nations Charter, Chapter I: Purposes and Principles*. 26.06.1945. <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/un-charter/chapter-1>



The Baltic Appeal to the United Nations (BATUN) organized a Baltic demonstration in front of the UN building in New York, the US, 28.09.1979. Participants included Uldis Blukis, Ints Rupners, Jānis Riekstiņš, and Helēna Celmiņa, as well as Estonian and Lithuanian communities.⁷

Latvia's experience during World War II serves as both a reminder and a warning of how harsh an unregulated international system can be towards smaller nations.

Latvian engagement with the UN began even before the restoration of Latvia's independence. On November 13, 1965, a demonstration by Baltic exile organizations took place in New York, where a resolution was adopted calling for an end to the colonization of the Baltic States, reminding the rest of the world of the occupation.

On February 9, 1966, the exiled Baltic communities established

⁷ Collection of the Museum of the Occupation of Latvia.

the Baltic Appeal to the United Nations (BATUN).⁸ The options for the Baltic expats were limited, as their objectives conflicted with the policies and aims of the great powers. At times, other nations took advantage of the situation of the Baltic States to exert influence over the Soviet Union.

In 1971, Balts in exile recognized that it was more effective to draw attention to individual human rights violations. Since then, exiled Baltic communities regularly reported on the desire of the Baltic States for independence. Keeping the “Baltic issue” alive at the UN subsequently aided the Baltic countries in their pursuit of reestablishing their independence.⁹

The international recognition of the Baltic States in August 1991 created a favorable environment for their admission to the UN. Although the Soviet stance was unclear, France and the United Kingdom (UK) took the initiative to organize the admission of the Baltic States. The Soviet Union did not object to the admission of the Baltic countries to the UN.¹⁰ Thus, on September 17, 1991, Latvia, together with Estonia and Lithuania, became a full member of the UN.

Andrejs Pildegovičs, former Latvia’s Ambassador and Permanent Representative to the United Nations in New York, considers that Latvia’s involvement in the UN can be divided into

⁸ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia (2020). *An exhibition was unveiled on contributions by BATUN, a Baltic exile organisation, to the restoration of the Baltic States’ independence*. 18.09.2020. <https://www.mfa.gov.lv/en/article/exhibition-unveiled-contributions-batun-baltic-exile-organisation-restoration-baltic-states-independence>; Ainso, S. O. (2018). *The Story of BATUN 1966.–1991 (Baltic Appeal to the United Nations)*. Eesti Rahvusraamatukogu. <https://www.digar.ee/viewer/en/nlib-digar:416163/356644/page/1>

⁹ Indāns, I. and Gregors, R. V. (1999). *Latvijas ārpolitika ANO ietvaros*. Latvijas Ārpolitikas institūts. pp. 14–15. <https://www.lai.lv/publikacijas/latvijas-arpolitika-ano-ietvaros-39>

¹⁰ Indāns, I. and Gregors, R. V. (1999). *Latvijas ārpolitika ANO ietvaros*. Latvijas Ārpolitikas institūts. p. 16. <https://www.lai.lv/publikacijas/latvijas-arpolitika-ano-ietvaros-39>



Flag-raising ceremony at the UN headquarters in New York, the US, 17.09.1991.¹¹

three periods.¹² The first stage lasted from 1991 to 1998. During this period, Latvia gradually regained its place in the international political arena, achieved the withdrawal of more than 51 thousand Russian troops¹³ from its territory, and consolidated the state-building and reform processes.

The UN also played a crucial role in helping the Baltic States achieve the withdrawal of the Russian army from their territory following the restoration of independence. In 1992 and 1993,

¹¹ United Nations (1991). *Flag-Raising Ceremony Marks Admission of Seven States to UN Membership*. Photo by Eskinder Debebe. <https://media.un.org/photo/en/asset/oun7/oun7564469>

¹² Andrejs Pildegovičs (Ambassador-at-Large at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia, Director of Task Force for Latvia's Candidacy for the United Nations Security Council). Online interview. 06.02.2025.

¹³ Museum of the Occupation of Latvia (2022). *Ieskats muzeja krājuma "Tas nu reiz ir noticis!"* 31.08.2022. <https://okupacijasmuzejs.lv/lv/aktualitates/tas-nu-reiz-ir-noticis>



Guntis Ulmanis, the President of Latvia (second from the left), and Aina Ulmane, the first lady of Latvia (on the right), meeting the UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali (second from the right) and his spouse Leia Boutros-Ghali (on the left), in New York, the US, 14.11.1994. President Ulmanis presented Latvia's gift: a tapestry titled "The Hope", created by Latvian artist Edite Pauls-Vignere.¹⁴

the UN General Assembly adopted two resolutions that placed international pressure on Russia. The resolutions were adopted by acclamation. The then UN Secretary-General, Boutros Boutros-Ghali, sent his rapporteur to Latvia, thereby personally supporting the process and providing first-hand reports about the human rights situation in the Baltic States.

The second stage spanned from 1998 to 2007–2008, during which Latvia joined the EU and NATO and strengthened its democracy. Consequently, it could gradually invest more efforts in expanding its vision and activities at the UN.

¹⁴ United Nations (1994). *Latvia Presents Gift to the United Nations*. Photo by Evan Schneider. 14.11.1994. <https://media.un.org/photo/en/asset/oun7/oun7676706>

This period concluded with the rise of a neo-imperialistic Russia. It progressively moved away from attempts at democratization and pan-European values, shifting towards authoritarianism domestically and aggressive policies internationally. One notable indicator was the infamous speech by Russia's president, Vladimir Putin, at the Munich Security Conference in 2007. The following year, Russia invaded Georgia, increasingly demonstrating its readiness to use military force to dismantle the rules-based international order and alter the sovereign borders of neighboring states by force.

Relations between Russia and Latvia have remained distrustful, and even now, Russia is attempting to influence the global community's perception of Latvia. One of the most typical examples includes unfounded accusations of potential human rights violations. For instance, in October 2024, Russia threatened to sue Latvia in the International Court of Justice over "racial discrimination".¹⁵

The third stage of Latvia and the UN commenced in 2008, when Latvia, as a stable and thriving European democracy, gradually increased its involvement and profile on the UN stage. This includes participation in peacekeeping missions, arms control, disarmament, and non-proliferation mechanisms, among many other efforts. Latvia's contributions to development cooperation gradually expanded from Ukraine and the Caucasus to Central Asia, the Middle East, and Africa.

¹⁵ Lsm.lv (2024). *Krievija grasoties iesūdzēt Latviju ANO tiesā par "rasu diskrimināciju"*. 31.10.2024. <https://www.lsm.lv/raksts/zinas/arzemes/31.10.2024-krievija-grasoties-iesudzet-latviju-ano-tiesa-par-rasu-diskriminaciju.a574715/>

Table 1. Timeline of Latvia's journey with the UN.

Year	Occasion
1991	Latvia received international recognition for its re-gained independence and joined the UN
1991	Latvia joined UNESCO and WHO
1992	The UN General Assembly adopted a resolution regarding the "complete withdrawal of foreign military forces from the territories of the Baltic States" ¹⁶
1992	Latvia joined UNICEF
1993	The UNDP was launched in Latvia
1994	The UNODC Baltic Regional Office was opened in Riga, Latvia
1996	Latvia was elected to the UN Economic and Social Council ¹⁷
1998	The UNHCR Baltic Regional Office was opened in Riga, Latvia
1999	An UN House was opened in Latvia
1999	Latvia became a member of the WTO
2004	The UNDP concluded its work in Latvia
2006	Vaira Vīķe-Freiberga, the President of Latvia, was nominated as the Baltic candidate for the UN Secretary-General position

¹⁶ United Nations (1992). *Complete Withdrawal of Foreign Military Forces from the Territories of the Baltic States* [1992] UNGA 67; A/RES/47/21 (25 November 1992). <https://docs.un.org/en/A/RES/47/21>. The UN General Assembly reaffirmed this resolution in 1993 (United Nations Digital Library (1993). *Complete withdrawal of foreign military forces from the territories of the Baltic States: resolution/adopted by the General Assembly, UN General Assembly* (48th sess. –1993–1994). <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/178367?ln=en&u=pdf>)

¹⁷ Latvia was elected to the UN Economic and Social Council for the second and third time for the 2011 to 2013 and 2020 to 2022 terms, respectively.

Year	Occasion
2007	Latvia was elected to the UN Commission on Science and Technology for Development ¹⁸
2011	Latvia applied for a non-permanent seat on the UN Security Council
2013	Latvia was elected to the UN Women
2014	Latvia was elected to the UN Human Rights Council
2016	Latvia joined the MINUSMA
2019	Latvia became a member of the UN Youth Programme
2021	Latvia was elected to the UN Commission on the Status of Women
2021	Latvia's representative was elected to the International Law Commission
2021	Latvia was elected to the UN Peacebuilding Commission
2022	Latvia was elected to the UN Subcommittee on the Prevention of Torture
2022	Latvia joined the UNTSO
2023	Latvia joined the UNIFIL
2023	Latvia was elected as a member of the Executive Board of the UN Women
2025	Latvia became a member of the UN Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice
2025	Latvia was elected to the UN Security Council for the 2026 to 2027 term

¹⁸ Latvia was re-elected to the UN Commission on Science and Technology for Development in 2018 for the term 2019 to 2022.

Over the years, Latvia has engaged at the UN on various issues far beyond its immediate priorities, including gender equality, media freedom, information technologies, digitalization, information integrity, artificial intelligence, and climate change. These priorities were also significant in Latvia's journey toward the UN Security Council 2026–2027.¹⁹ Notably, Latvia played a leading role in highlighting the suffering of women in Ukraine due to sexual violence during Russia's war.²⁰ Concerning media freedom and information integrity, Latvia initiated a resolution to combat the spread of disinformation and misinformation.²¹ Latvia also offered its expertise to the Pacific Island countries²² and in the field of digitalization²³.

Latvia also advocates for the rights of indigenous peoples and the development of endangered languages. This commitment is further evidenced by the election of Valts Ernštreits, an expert on the Finno-Ugric Livonian language and culture, to the UN

¹⁹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia (2024). *Latvia at the UN, Permanent Mission of the Republic of Latvia to the UN, OSCE, and other international organisations in Vienna*. <https://www2.mfa.gov.lv/en/vienna/2016-08-18-14-10-14>

²⁰ Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Latvia (2024). *Prime Minister underscores the importance of gender equality in her address to the United Nations*. <https://www.mk.gov.lv/en/article/prime-minister-underscores-importance-gender-equality-her-address-united-nations>

²¹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia (2021). *Latvia as initiator of a resolution just adopted by the United Nations for fighting the spread of disinformation and misinformation*. 25.03.2021. <https://www.mfa.gov.lv/en/article/latvia-initiator-resolution-just-adopted-united-nations-fighting-spread-disinformation-and-misinformation>

²² Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia (2025). *Latvia offers highest-level legal expertise to the Pacific Island Countries*. 28.03.2025. <https://www.mfa.gov.lv/en/article/latvia-offers-highest-level-legal-expertise-pacific-island-countries>

²³ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia (2024). *Foreign Minister at the UN General Assembly: Latvia is ready to share its experience in digitalisation and countering disinformation*. 23.09.2024. <https://www.mfa.gov.lv/en/article/foreign-minister-un-general-assembly-latvia-ready-share-its-experience-digitalisation-and-countering-disinformation>

Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues from 2026 to 2028.²⁴

Latvia's financial contributions to the UN are gradually increasing each year. From 2019 to 2025, the annual mandatory contributions rose from EUR 1.20 million to EUR 1.56 million, with total contributions exceeding EUR 9.29 million.²⁵ These contributions are tied to the country's growth rate.

In addition to mandatory contributions, Latvia also makes voluntary contributions. The first of these was in 2014, when Latvia contributed 25 thousand EUR to the budget of the UNDOF (United Nations Disengagement Observer Force), strengthening the border in the Golan Heights between Israel and Syria.²⁶ Henceforth, Latvia has expanded its assistance activities. For instance, Latvia contributed 0.86 million EUR to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA) in 2023.²⁷ Most of the funds were dedicated to Turkey following the earthquake in February 2023 (0.56 million EUR). Latvia also assisted Slovenia after the floods. Another example is that in 2022, Latvia donated 0.12 million EUR to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). This contribution was entirely dedicated to Ukrainian refugees who left their country

²⁴ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia (2025). Facebook post. 04.04.2025. <https://www.facebook.com/arlietuminstrija/posts/-dr-ualts-ern%C5%Altrets-ir-iev%C4%93l%C4%93ts-ano-past%C4%81u%C4%ABgaj%C4%81-forum%C4%81-pamatiedz%C4%ABuot%C4%81ju-jaut%C4%81ju/1076516571166853/>

²⁵ United Nations (2025). *Contributions received for 2025 for the United Nations Regular Budget*. <https://www.un.org/en/ga/contributions/honourroll.shtml> (Converted from USD to EUR according to the exchange rate 1 USD = 0.92 EUR (19.03.2025)).

²⁶ Lsm.lv (2014). *Latvija veiks savā vēsturē pirmo iemaksu ANO miera uzturēšanas operācijas budžetā*. <https://www.lsm.lv/raksts/zinas/latvija/latvija-veiks-sava-ves-ture-pirmo-iemaksu-ano-miera-uzturesanas-operacijas-budzeta.a105640/>

²⁷ OCHA Services (2025). *Latvia, Government of 2023*. <https://fts.unocha.org/donors/4850/flows/2023> (Converted from USD to EUR according to the exchange rate 1 USD=0.91 EUR (07.04.2025)).

because of the Russian full-scale invasion.²⁸ Humanitarian aid has also been provided outside of Europe. In 2023, Latvia supported efforts to address the crises caused by climate change and natural disasters in Pakistan and Tonga, as well as the resolution of the humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan.²⁹ This feature confirms Latvia's desire to cooperate with geographically distant regions, including Africa.³⁰

²⁸ UNHCR (2025). *Latvian Contributions to UNHCR*. <https://www.unhcr.org/neu/latvian-government> (Converted from USD to EUR according to the exchange rate 1 USD=0.91 EUR (07.04.2025))

²⁹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia (2023). *Foreign Minister: over the past year, Latvia has delivered humanitarian assistance worldwide amounting to four million euros*. 20.03.2023. <https://www.mfa.gov.lv/en/article/foreign-minister-over-past-year-latvia-has-delivered-humanitarian-assistance-worldwide-amounting-four-million-euros>

³⁰ Ģermanis, K. and Andžāns, M. (2024). *Latvia and African Countries: At the Beginning of a New Road*. Center for Geopolitical Studies Riga. <https://www.geopolitics.center/outputs/latvia-and-african-countries-at-the-beginning-of-a-new-road>

2. The Importance and Influence of the UN on Latvia

The UN's significance is twofold in Latvia. First, it influences external affairs. Second, it affects the dynamics of internal policies. The UN is indispensable, especially for small and medium-sized countries, because it offers a global platform to elevate their voice, express their interests, and to strengthen their security within the framework of international law and the rules-based international order, notes Andrejs Pildegovičs.³¹

Another advantage of the UN is helping its member states recognize issues beyond the scope of interest of local populations, but which are nevertheless crucial for other nations. As Latvia's Ambassador and Permanent Representative to the UN in New York Sanita Pavļuta-Deslandes notes, "there is no shortage of problems: wars, poverty, climate threats, when entire countries' territories might vanish as the sea level rises. (...) The influence of the European and other Western partners can be rather limited at the UN compared to the number of votes of the developing countries. It is an eye-opener. We must engage in a dialogue and listen

³¹ Andrejs Pildegovičs. Online interview. 06.02.2025.

to countries from other regions.”³² As noted by Jānis Kārklīņš, former Latvia’s Ambassador to the United Nations in Geneva, Latvia will adhere to certain principles. These include the rules-based international order and the rule of law, the observance of human rights and fundamental freedoms, and other values enshrined in the UN Charter.³³

Latvia’s development cooperation has been significantly influenced by the UN. Its development cooperation system is based on the global development agenda and agreements, including the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (the 2030 Agenda, adopted in 2015), which sets 17 Sustainable Development Goals, and the Paris Agreement on climate change.³⁴

As early as 2016, Latvia’s Development Cooperation Policy Guidelines (adopted by the UN Agenda for Sustainable Development until 2030) identified Latvia as a donor country.³⁵

Also, Latvia’s Development Cooperation Policy Framework for 2021–2027 indicates that Latvia’s development cooperation is growing, and priority regions are Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova, Georgia, Armenia, Central Asian and African countries. “While the Ministry of Foreign Affairs increases funding for bilateral development cooperation, efforts should be made to support activities beyond the traditional priority regions. Latvia’s candidacy for the UN Security Council elections in 2025 will be essential for enhancing regional involvement, creating opportunities to showcase Latvia’s solutions and expertise in countries and regions

³² Sanita Pavļuta-Deslandes (Latvia’s Ambassador and Permanent Representative to the United Nations in New York). Online interview. 14.02.2025.

³³ Jānis Kārklīņš (Former Latvia’s Ambassador to the United Nations in Geneva). Online interview. 14.02.2025; Sanita Pavļuta-Deslandes. Online interview. 14.02.2025.

³⁴ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia (2024). *Latvia’s Development Cooperation Policy*. <https://www.mfa.gov.lv/en/latvias-development-cooperation-policy>

³⁵ Likumi.lv (2016). *Par attīstības sadarbības politikas pamatnostādņēm 2016.–2020. gadam*. 14.09.2016. <https://likumi.lv/ta/id/284775-par-attistibas-sadarbibas-politikas-pamatnostadnem-20162020-gada>



Vaira Vīķe-Freiberga, President of Latvia, meets the Secretary-General of the UN, Kofi Annan, at the UN Headquarters in New York, the US, 08.03.2006.³⁶

that have not yet been included in Latvia's bilateral development cooperation agenda."³⁷

It is important to note that these guidelines were developed before Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, but after the widespread protests in Belarus in August and September 2020. This example highlights, on one hand, regional security, and on the other, the development of relations with countries outside the current circle of interests.

Latvia gradually accelerated its efforts to introduce the world to Latvia's priorities. The UN provides such an opportunity, but

³⁶ United Nations (2006). Photo by Mark Garten. Provided by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia.

³⁷ Likumi.lv (2021). *Par Attīstības sadarbības politikas pamatnostādņēm 2021–2027. gadam*. 14.04.2021. <https://likumi.lv/ta/id/322455-par-attistibas-sadarbibas-politikas-pamatnostadnem-20212027-gadam>

it is up to each country to take advantage of it or miss it. For Latvia, explaining the security issues in the Baltic Sea region is crucial. In countries far from Russia, the situation on the eastern shores of the Baltic Sea has been less well-known. Although this organization is often criticized for endless discussions, it serves as a diplomatic means to avert wars and other forms of military escalation. Sanita Pavļuta-Deslandes emphasizes that for smaller nations, the multilateral system is existential.³⁸ Nevertheless, the work at the UN often goes unnoticed in Latvia. This is likely due to the strong connections and considerable Latvian media focus on the EU and NATO, which have relegated the UN to a secondary role behind these two organizations.

Related to that, the UN is not as well known in Latvian society as it is in some other member states, where the UN is more visible. The activities of the UN, particularly regarding coordination, technical support, or humanitarian assistance, may be better recognized by the inhabitants of those countries whose lives depend on international aid. In other regions, there are countries where daily life and even national economies, security, and costly purchases rely partially on UN aid and infrastructure.

Regarding attitudes towards the UN in Latvia, in a 2024 poll, 43% of respondents said they trust the UN, while 36% said they do not. The remaining 21% of respondents had no opinion on the UN. Almost identical figures are observed when assessing opinions on the UN: 41% held a favorable view, 34% expressed a negative view, while 25% had no opinion. Women and young people tend to have a more positive view of the UN.³⁹

A similar process – from recipient to contributor, from observer to participant – has been observed in various sectors. Starting in the 1990s, Latvia began adopting UN-facilitated practices in several areas, including education and healthcare. At that

³⁸ Sanita Pavļuta-Deslandes. Online interview. 14.02.2025.

³⁹ Berg Research (2024). *CAWI internet survey N-1010 in all LATVIA, n-1010 in all Latvia, 15.10.–24.11.*

time, Latvia was not yet a member of the EU, but its participation in the UN facilitated the adoption of norms significant for EU accession. Thus, Latvia gradually reached a level within the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) where, in 2002, it became a donor, aid provider, and consultant.⁴⁰

Various UN agencies were well-represented in Latvia, providing various forms of aid and assistance. Among them is the UNDP, which began operations in Latvia in 1993 when the UN and Latvia agreed to collaborate on promoting development. Subsequently, from 2001 to 2004, both parties committed to advancing social integration, alleviating poverty, supporting non-governmental organizations, and fostering gender equality and youth health initiatives.⁴¹ In 1994, Latvia signed an observer agreement with the International Organization for Migration, and in 1999, it became a full member of this organization.⁴² The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime examines the circulation of drugs and crime in Latvia.⁴³ UNHCR, on the other hand, has maintained a liaison office in Latvia since 2022, coinciding with the Ukrainian refugee crisis⁴⁴ (there were 43,4 thousand Ukrainian refugees registered in Latvia at the beginning of 2024)⁴⁵.

Latvia's development and adaptation to international standards were facilitated by its accession to UN agencies and the preceding accession negotiation process. For example, for

⁴⁰ Delfi (2002). *Latviju iekļauj ANO Attīstības programmā kā donorvalsti*. <https://www.delfi.lv/193/politics/3611977/latviju-iekļauj-ano-attistibas-programma-ka-donorvalsti>

⁴¹ Latvijas Vēstnesis (2002). *Par ANO Attīstības programmas un Latvijas valdības sadarbību*. 30.12.2002. <https://www.vestnesis.lv/ta/id/69807>

⁴² International Organization for Migration (2025). *Latvia*. <https://www.iom.int/countries/latvia>

⁴³ UNODC (2025). *Latvia. Country Profile*. <https://dataunodc.un.org/content/country-list>

⁴⁴ UNHCR (2025). *UNHCR Latvijā*. <https://www.unhcr.org/neu/lu/musu-darbs/unhcr-latvija>

⁴⁵ Latvijas Vēstnesis (2024). *"Ukrainas bēgļi Latvijā. Zināmais un nezināmais"*. 20.09.2024. <https://lportal.lv/norises/367818-ukrainas-begli-latvija-zinamais-un-nezinamais-2024>

World Trade Organization (WTO) membership, participation in bilateral negotiations with all interested WTO members on market access was necessary.

Over the years, the World Health Organization (WHO) has been actively involved in addressing nearly all major public health issues in Latvia. This includes the development of public health strategies, HIV/AIDS and tuberculosis strategies, tobacco and alcohol control policies, environmental health policies; the promotion of reproductive, sexual, maternal health; the creation of a health financing model; the establishment of a system of reimbursable medicines; the promotion of vaccination and mental health; and the formulation of legislation regarding patients' rights.⁴⁶

Jānis Kārklīšs notes that UNESCO has demonstrated its significance in Latvia on several occasions. The listing of Latvia's capital, Riga, founded in 1201, as a UNESCO World Heritage site has likely enhanced the city's appeal to tourists. Furthermore, in 2023, the town of Kuldīga was added to the list. The Latvian National Library was also developed with UNESCO support, and media and information literacy training were initiated in collaboration with UNESCO.⁴⁷

Partly under the influence of UNESCO, Latvia has begun to develop Latvian schools through the project of "qualitative and inclusive education".⁴⁸ Baiba Moļņika, the Secretary General of the Latvian National Commission for UNESCO, explains that this means the educational system – whether for children with disabilities or particular talents – must adapt to children and their needs

⁴⁶ Rūrāne, A. (2024). *Latvija un globālo veselības mērķu īstenošana*. In: Reire, G. (Ed.) *Latvija Apvienotajās Nācijās*. Zinātne. p. 61.

⁴⁷ Jānis Kārklīšs. Online interview. 14.02.2025.

⁴⁸ UNESCO Latvijas Nacionālā komisija (2018). *UNESCO: Kvalitatīva izglītība ir visu iesaistīto pušu atbildība* <https://www.unesco.lv/lv/jaunums/unesco-kvalitativa-izglitiba-ir-visu-iesaistito-pusu-atbildiba>; Baiba Moļņika. *Iekļaujoša izglītība. UNESCO skatījums*. <https://www.ikud.gov.lv/lv/media/4127/download>

rather than the other way around.⁴⁹ Currently, in collaboration with UNESCO, Latvia is also developing an ethical framework for using artificial intelligence and promoting information literacy. At the same time, Latvia can provide expertise to other countries in preschool education.⁵⁰

Ivars Pundurs, Latvia's current Ambassador to the UN in Geneva, emphasizes that the UN continues to provide vital assistance to vulnerable groups such as refugees and migrants. Although the UN could be more effective, it is still the best tool on a global scale.⁵¹ Meanwhile, Elina Šteinerte, the Vice-Chair of the National Preventive Mechanism at the UN Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture, notes that certain aspects of UN activities, such as the release of political prisoners in various countries, remain little known to the public because some results are best achieved "out of public sight".⁵²

Jānis Mažeiks, a former Latvia's Ambassador and Permanent Representative to the UN in New York, notes that, often, criticism of the UN is based on a "black-white" perception, in which the UN is expected to solve all problems. In reality, there are situations where the UN can make a difference and where it cannot.⁵³

As Baiba Braže, Latvia's Minister of Foreign Affairs, admits, "the UN is facing a political crisis. The UN Security Council has been unable to make decisions regarding Russia's war against Ukraine for an extended period due to the veto power of the aggressor state, Russia. Additionally, the UN is undergoing a severe

⁴⁹ Baiba Molņika (Secretary General of the Latvian National Commission for UNESCO). Online interview. 05.03.2025.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ivars Pundurs (Latvia's Ambassador to the United Nations in Geneva). Online interview. 04.03.2025.

⁵² Elina Šteinerte (Vice Chair of the National Preventive Mechanism, UN Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture). Online interview. 04.03.2025.

⁵³ Jānis Mažeiks (Former Latvia's Ambassador and Permanent Representative to the United Nations in New York). Online interview 27.03.2025.



Ukrainian children at the opening ceremony of the restored kindergarten and the children's hospital kitchen in Chernihiv, Ukraine. The buildings were jointly renovated by Latvia and UNDP. The kindergarten and hospital were damaged during the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine.⁵⁴

budget crisis (...). However, according to the minister, the UN Security Council remains a pivotal multilateral point of gravity – an exclusive club of states that has the authority to make decisions binding on all UN member states in the area of peace and security. Neglecting the UN Security Council could potentially lead to its being occupied by, for Latvia, unfriendly countries.”⁵⁵

Latvia utilizes every available multilateral format to defend Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity, highlight

⁵⁴ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia (2025). *Černihivā Latvijas vēstnieks atklāj atjaunoto bērnudārzu un bērnu slimnīcas ēdināšanas bloku*. Photo by Viktor Koshmal. <https://www.mfa.gov.lv/lv/jaunums/cernihiva-latvijas-vestnieks-atklaj-atjaunoto-bernudarzu-un-bernu-slimnिकास-edinasanas-bloku>

⁵⁵ Baiba Braže (Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia). E-mail exchange. 28.03.2025.

the global consequences of Russia's war against Ukraine, and emphasize the necessity of holding Russia accountable for its crimes in Ukraine. Latvia has consistently worked to dispel Russia's hostile disinformation and false narratives in international organizations.⁵⁶

At the same time, achieving one's goals is a complex process. Many plans must be coordinated with countries that have different perspectives and priorities. Consequently, the outcome may differ from the initial intention. Upholding the established international law in its entirety and, indirectly, reinforcing Latvia's security within the UN framework will likely be a challenging endeavor. One of the permanent members of the UN Security Council with veto power is Russia, which has been invading Ukraine since 2014, meaning that Latvia and its allies will need to exert continuous effort to support Ukraine.

While Latvia's attention is directed towards regional security issues, the UN perspective encourages reflection on more distant regions of the globe and how actions here impact our wellbeing. Wars, cyber attacks, and climate impacts can have cascading impacts across regions. For instance, conflicts or disasters occurring elsewhere in the world can increase food or energy prices, impact the spread of diseases, or lead to refugee flows that directly affect Latvia.

Zinta Zommers from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) notes that the UN coordinates a vast international framework of cooperation and aid that supports people in fragile and conflict-affected contexts. The UN can help governments deal with emergencies to minimize impacts locally and globally.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Baiba Braže. E-mail exchange. 04.03.2025.

⁵⁷ Zinta Zommers (Vice-Chair of the Working Group II at the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change). Online interview. 05.03.2025.

3. Latvia's Contributions to UN Efforts

In the first decade of the 2000s, Latvia began nominating its candidates for UN positions. In 2003, Anita Ušacka was elected to the International Criminal Court (ICC).⁵⁸ But the most prominent nomination was the joint Baltic candidacy of then-Latvian President Vaira Viķe-Freiberga for the position of UN Secretary-General in 2006.

By gradually integrating into the UN, Latvia's experts have also become more frequently employed by the UN and its agencies. Table 2 shows that the number of Latvian representatives working in the UN and its agencies is steadily increasing. Between 2011 and 2022, the number of employees nearly doubled from 11 to 21. The most significant increase occurred from 2019 to 2020, when the employee count rose from 15 to 20.

⁵⁸ International Criminal Court (2025). *Judge Anita Ušacka*. <https://www.icc-cpi.int/judges/judge-anita-usacka>

Table 2. Citizens of Latvia employed by the UN, 2010-2022.⁵⁹

Year	Number of Latvian citizens employed by the UN	Percentage of all UN staff
2022	21	0.06
2021	21	0.06
2020	20	0.05
2019	15	0.04
2018	15	0.04
2017	17	0.04
2016	15	0.04
2015	14	0.03
2014	14	0.03
2013	14	0.03
2012	13	0.03
2011	11	0.03
2010	12	0.03

Several officials from Latvia are high-ranking UN officials who frequently enter the public and media spotlight. For instance, Ilze Brands-Kehris is an Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights and Head of the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights,⁶⁰ representing the highest position ever achieved

⁵⁹ United Nations Digital Library (2025). *All staff by nationality, gender, category and appointment type, 2010–2022*. <https://digitallibrary.un.org/search?ln=en&as=1&ml=p&pl=-Composition%20of%20the%20Secretariat.%20Report%20of%20the%20Secretary-General&f1=series&op1=a&m2=a&p2=f&f2=f&op2=a&m3=a&p3=f&f3=f&dt=f&dld=f&d1m=f&dly=f&d2d=f&d2m=f&d2y=f&rm=f&sf=year&so=d&rg=50&c=United%20Nations%20Digital%20Library%20System&of=hb&fti=0&fti=0>

⁶⁰ United Nations (2025). *Ilze Brands-Kehris*. <https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/profiles/ilze-brands-kehris>



Elina Šteinerte, Vice-Chair on the National Preventive Mechanism at the UN Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture.⁶¹

by a Latvian in the UN. Zinta Zommers is a Vice-Chair working for the IPCC.⁶² Mārtiņš Paparinskis was elected to the International Law Commission and is the chair of this commission in 2025.⁶³ Additionally, Nils Muižnieks was appointed as the new UN Special Rapporteur on the human rights situation in Belarus, and Elina Šteinerte as the Vice-Chair for the National Preventive Mechanism at the UN Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture.⁶⁴

The involvement in the UN also includes the participation of Latvian companies in UN procurements. Statistics indicate that

⁶¹ Private archive of Elina Šteinerte.

⁶² IPCC (2025). *Zinta Zommers*. <https://www.ipcc.ch/people/zinta-zommers/>

⁶³ Lsm.lv (2021). *Latvia's Paparinskis elected to International Law Commission*. 13.11.2021. <https://eng.lsm.lv/article/politics/diplomacy/latvias-paparinskis-elected-to-international-law-commission.a430075/>

⁶⁴ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia (2024). *United Nations Human Rights Council appoints Nils Muižnieks as the new UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Belarus*. 11.10.2024. <https://www2.mfa.gov.lv/en/geneva/news/71592-united-nations-human-rights-council-appoints-nils-muiznieks-as-the-new-un-special-rapporteur-on-the-situation-of-human-rights-in-belarus>

the services provided and products offered by Latvian companies for UN agencies have increased more than sixfold in monetary value (see Table 3). On the other hand, this increase mainly occurred from 2022 to 2023, so it remains unclear whether such an increase is a one-off event or indicates a long-term trend. Over the years, the number of suppliers has increased.

Table 3. UN procurements from Latvian companies, 2013–2023.⁶⁵

Year	Procurement value (million EUR)	Number of UN organizations procuring from Latvian companies	Ranking of Latvia by UN procurement value	Percentage of total UN procurement from Latvia	Number of Latvian suppliers registered in the UN Global Marketplace
2023	11.57	12	137th	<0.1%	169
2022	3.55	14	168th	<0.1%	141
2021	2.82	12	169th	<0.1%	143
2020	4.61	12	161st	<0.1%	133
2019	2.55	14	165th	<0.1%	115
2018	4.88	13	146th	<0.1%	104
2017	8.83	11	126th	<0.1%	121
2016	3.62	13	145th	<0.1%	88
2015	1.84	10	169th	<0.1%	66
2014	1.50	10	168th	<0.1%	-
2013	1.75	9	164th	<0.1%	-
Total	47.52				

⁶⁵ United Nations Global Marketplace (2025). “UN procurements ensured by Latvia” (“Annual Statistical Report on United Nations Procurement”). https://www.ungm.org/Shared/KnowledgeCenter/Pages/asr_data_country (Converted from USD to EUR according to exchange rate 1 USD=0.92 EUR (19.03.2025)).

Continuing from Table 3, the following table – Table 4 – shows that the volume of both services and products is increasing in monetary terms. Furthermore, when comparing 2022 and 2023, the increase in the monetary volume of the services and products provided is apparent. Latvia aims to increase the number of UN procurements managed by Latvian companies.

Table 4. Distribution of UN procurements from Latvian companies by goods and services, 2013–2023.⁶⁶

Year	Total (million EUR)	Goods (million EUR)	Services (million EUR)
2023	11.57	5.03	6.54
2022	3.55	2.62	0.93
2021	2.82	1.70	1.12
2020	4.61	3.29	1.32
2019	2.55	1.60	0.95
2018	4.88	4.31	0.57
2017	8.83	8.26	0.57
2016	3.62	2.84	0.78
2015	1.84	0.82	1.02
2014	1.50	0.95	0.55
2013	1.75	1.25	0.50
Total	47.52	32.67	14.85

When it comes to UN agencies, the most substantial monetary benefits for Latvian companies have emerged from the UNDP (see Table 5). Between 2013 and 2023, Latvian companies obtained

⁶⁶ United Nations Global Marketplace (2025). *Procurement Data By Supplier Country*. https://www.ungm.org/Shared/KnowledgeCenter/Pages/asr_data_country (Converted from USD to EUR according to exchange rate 1 USD=0.92 EUR (19.03.2025)).

UNDP procurements totaling 16.54 million EUR. Procurements from the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), and other organizations have been of lesser significance.

Table 5. Distribution of UN procurements from Latvian companies by procuring UN agencies (TOP 5), 2013–2023.⁶⁷

UN agency	Procurement amount (million EUR)
UNDP	16.54
IAEA	7.27
UNFPA	6.96
UNICEF	5.12
WFP	4.78

In terms of goods and services (see Table 6), Latvian companies primarily supply pharmaceuticals, contraceptives, and vaccines. The amounts for other categories are significantly lower.

Table 6. Distribution of UN procurements from Latvian companies by product and service categories (TOP 5), 2013–2023.⁶⁸

Category	Procurement amount (million EUR)
Pharmaceuticals, contraceptives, vaccines	22.25
Laboratory and testing equipment	5.99
Transportation, storage, mail services	5.08
Management and administrative services	4.41

⁶⁷ United Nations Global Marketplace (2025). *Procurement Data By Supplier Country*. https://www.ungm.org/Shared/KnowledgeCenter/Pages/asr_data_country (Converted from USD to EUR according to exchange rate 1 USD=0.92 EUR (19.03.2025)).

⁶⁸ Ibid.

Engineering and research services	1.13
Others	5.16

As Table 7 shows, between 2015 and 2023, the largest supplier among Latvian entrepreneurs in financial terms was the pharmaceutical products wholesaler Magnipharma with 10.05 million EUR. The second largest supplier related to pharmaceuticals was Grindeks (5.91 million EUR), while the third, an electronics manufacturer, was Baltic Scientific Instruments (4.41 million EUR).

Table 7. Latvian companies – UN suppliers (largest in procurement volume), 2015–2023.⁶⁹

Supplier	Procurement amount (million EUR)
Magnipharma	10.05
Grindeks	5.91
Baltic Scientific Instruments	4.41
Unifreight Logistics	3.35
Kalceks	3.17
An unidentified company	1.23
ZRF Ritec	1.15
Vizulo Solutions	1.06

It is notable that Latvian companies have gained more from UN procurements than Latvia has contributed to the UN as part of the annual mandatory contributions (which are tied to the country's growth rate). For example, in 2023, Latvia's payment share

⁶⁹ United Nations Global Marketplace (2025). *Procurement Data By Supplier*. https://www.ungm.org/Shared/KnowledgeCenter/Pages/asr_data_supplier (Converted from USD to EUR according to exchange rate 1 USD=0.88 EUR (24.04.2025)).



Latvian peacekeepers serving in UNIFIL in 2023.⁷⁰

was 1.34 million EUR,⁷¹ but Latvian companies, in that same year, gained contracts worth 11.57 million EUR.⁷²

Next, Latvia has participated in several UN missions, including the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission (MINUSMA)⁷³ from 2016 to 2022, the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO)⁷⁴ from 2022, and the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL)⁷⁵ from 2023 onwards.

⁷⁰ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia (2023). *Latvia at the UN*. Photo by Christian Donadeo. <https://www.mfa.gov.lv/en/latvia-un>

⁷¹ United Nations (2025). *Contributions received for 2025 for the United Nations Regular Budget*. <https://www.un.org/en/ga/contributions/honourroll.shtml> (Converted from USD to EUR according to the exchange rate 1 USD = 0.92 EUR (19.03.2025)).

⁷² United Nations Global Marketplace (2025). *Procurement Data By Supplier Country*. https://www.ungm.org/Shared/KnowledgeCenter/Pages/asr_data_country (Converted from USD to EUR according to exchange rate 1 USD=0.92 EUR (19.03.2025)).

⁷³ United Nations Peacekeeping (2025). MINUSMA. <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/mission/minusma>

⁷⁴ United Nations Peacekeeping (2025). UNTSO. <https://untso.unmissions.org/>

⁷⁵ United Nations Peacekeeping (2025). UNIFIL. <https://unifil.unmissions.org/>

Participation in UN missions exemplifies how Latvia has transitioned from being a recipient to a giver.

Table 8. Latvia's contribution to MINUSMA (2016–2022), UNTSO (2022– ongoing), and UNIFIL (2023– ongoing).⁷⁶

Year	Number of military personnel
2025	36 ⁷⁷
2024	2
2023	4
2022	2
2021	2
2020	2
2019	8
2018	16
2017	12
2016	2

The data in Table 8 shows the number of Latvian military personnel deployed to three UN peace missions. For example, in 2017–2018, Latvia had 12 and 16 military personnel deployed in Mali, respectively. Latvian soldiers concluded their duties in 2022, while a year later, this mission was terminated following the demand of Mali's military junta.⁷⁸

Since 2022, Latvia has participated in UNTSO. The mission aims to maintain peace along Israel's border with Egypt, Jordan,

⁷⁶ Ministry of Defence of the Republic Latvia (2025). Information provided to the Center for Geopolitical Studies Riga. 07.03.2025.

⁷⁷ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia (2025). *Latvijas dalība starptautiskajās misijās un operācijās, civilie eksperti*. 10.05.2025. <https://www.mfa.gov.lv/lv/daliba-starptautiskajas-misijas-un-operacijas-civilie-eksperti>

⁷⁸ Ibid.

and Syria. Initially, Latvia was represented by one staff officer in Jerusalem. Starting May 1, 2024, a Latvian representative holds an additional observer position, marking the first time the country has provided this type of specialist to the UN missions.⁷⁹ The Latvian Parliament has extended the involvement of Latvian military personnel in UNTSO until May 1, 2026.⁸⁰

Finally, since 2023, Latvia has participated in UNIFIL. The mission began in 1978 to observe the withdrawal of Israeli forces from Lebanon. Since 2006, the UN Security Council has expanded the mission's mandate to monitor the cessation of hostilities between Israel and Lebanon.⁸¹ It was within the framework of the mission in Lebanon that Latvia experienced a significant turning point in 2025. In March, the largest group of Latvian soldiers and National Guardsmen ever deployed to Lebanon consisted of a platoon-sized unit.⁸²

⁷⁹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia (2025). *Latvijas dalība starptautiskajās misijās un operācijās, civilie eksperti*. 10.05.2025. <https://www.mfa.gov.lv/lu/daliba-starptautiskajas-misijas-un-operacijas-civilie-eksperti>

⁸⁰ Ministry of Defence of the Republic Latvia (2024). *Valdība atbalsta Nacionālo bruņoto spēku karavīru dalības pagarināšanu ANO misijā Izraēlā*. 19.03.2024. <https://www.mod.gov.lv/lu/zinas/valdiba-atbalsta-nacionalo-brunoto-speku-karaviru-dalibas-pagarinasanu-ano-misija-izraela>

⁸¹ Ministry of Defence of the Republic Latvia (2025). Information provided to the Center for Geopolitical Studies Riga. 07.03.2025.

⁸² Skrudas televīzija (2025). *Pavada Latvijas karavīrus dalībai ANO misijā Libānā*. 07.03.2025. <https://www.lsm.lv/raksts/zinas/latvija/07.03.2025-pavada-latvijas-karavirus-dalibai-ano-misija-libana.a590746/>

4. Latvia's Role in the UN Today and in the Future

As Latvia's contributions to the UN steadily increase, including its financial support and participation in peacekeeping missions, its desire to play a more direct role in global peace and security decision-making has also grown. In 2011, the Latvian government submitted Latvia's candidacy for the UN Security Council.⁸³

The UN Security Council has five permanent members: China, France, Russia, the UK, and the US, as well as ten elected (also called non-permanent) members. Every year, the UN General Assembly elects five new member states for a two-year term, distributed among five regional groups. Latvia is part of a group of Eastern European countries consisting of 23 member states.⁸⁴ This group is represented by one member state as a non-permanent member on the UN Security Council, elected every other year.

The UN Security Council is not merely defined as Latvia's goal in the documents and policies of foreign affairs. Latvia's National Development Plan for 2021–2027, in the section "A United, Secure

⁸³ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia (2025). *Latvijas kandidātūra ANO Drošības padomē (2026–2027)*. 14.02.2025. <https://www.mfa.gov.lv/lu/latvijas-kandidatura-ano-drosibas-padome-2026-2027>

⁸⁴ United Nations (2025). *Group of Member States*. <https://www.un.org/en/model-unit-ed-nations/groups-member-states>

and Open Society”, acknowledges that “Latvia’s ability to build a united, secure, and open society will contribute to Latvia’s election to the UN Security Council in 2026–2027”.⁸⁵

Latvia’s goal of serving on the UN Security Council was aligned with the experiences of Lithuania, which was on the Council from 2014 to 2015,⁸⁶ and Estonia, which served there from 2020 to 2021.⁸⁷ Now, from 2026 to 2027, Latvia will represent the Eastern European Group at the epicenter of global politics.

The transition from a recipient to a contributor, which aligns with the notion of emphasizing global issues, is also evident in the goals set by Latvia for its election to the UN Security Council. Latvia prioritizes the countries’ territorial integrity, and sustainability – particularly in relation to climate change and adaptation, gender equality, and access to education for all societal groups, as well as broader and more thoughtful digitalization, artificial intelligence, and enhancing information and media literacy, in particular, in the context of information integrity.⁸⁸

As Andrejs Pildegovičs underlines, these themes must be acknowledged beyond Latvia. Latvia should cooperate and listen to the priorities of other countries as well. Latvia is committed to advocating for the interests of Ukraine and other vulnerable UN members, including small island states, whose existence is endangered by climate change and subsequent sea level rise.⁸⁹

⁸⁵ Likumi.lv (2020). *Par Latvijas Nacionālo attīstības plānu 2021.–2027.* 02.07.2020. <https://likumi.lv/ta/id/315879-par-latvijas-nacionalo-attistibas-planu-20212027-gadam-nap2027>

⁸⁶ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic Lithuania (2025). *Lithuania at UN Security Council*. <https://www.urm.lt/en/international-organizations/united-nations/lithuania-at-un-security-council/1010>

⁸⁷ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic Estonia (2025). *Estonia in the UN Security Council 2020–2021*. <https://um.ee/en/international-relations/un/estonia-un-security-council-2020-2021>

⁸⁸ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic Latvia (2025). *Par ko iestājas Latvija*. <https://www.mfa.gov.lv/lv/par-ko-iestajas-latvija>

⁸⁹ Andrejs Pildegovičs. Online interview. 06.02.2025.



Edgars Rinkēvičs, the President of Latvia, speaks during the UN Security Council's High-Level Open Debate in New York, the US, 09.11.2023.⁹⁰

This direction was outlined even more clearly in the annual report to Latvia's Parliament by the Foreign Minister of Latvia, Baiba Braže: "Latvia is moving towards membership in the UN Security Council at a time when Russia's aggression against Ukraine fundamentally threatens the foundations of the system of international relations on which Latvia's statehood and security are based. Membership in the UN Security Council is a contribution to strengthening Latvia's security and sovereignty".⁹¹

⁹⁰ President of the Republic of Latvia (2023). Flickr post. Photo by Ilmārs Znotiņš. 20.09.2023. <https://www.flickr.com/photos/valstsprezidents/53201894011/in/album-72177720311337160/>

⁹¹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia (2025). *Ārlietu ministres ziņojums par paveikto 2024.gadā un iecerēto darbību valsts ārpolitikā un Eiropas Savienības jautājumos 2025.gadā*. <https://www.mfa.gov.lv/lv/arlietu-ministra-ikgade-jais-zinojums>

In explaining its motivation for being on the UN Security Council, the Latvian Ministry of Foreign Affairs emphasizes that the UN has been one of the instruments for strengthening statehood. Accordingly, values such as human rights and international law, which reinforce Latvia's sovereignty, are and will remain priorities for Latvia at the global level. Latvia's national and security interests are closely tied to this. "Membership in the UN Security Council provides an opportunity to highlight issues that are relevant to the security of Latvia and the Baltic region. Latvia actively stands against Russian aggression in Ukraine and human rights violations in Belarus".⁹²

By standing up for Ukraine's independence and territorial integrity, Latvia is also strengthening its sovereignty. Russia's foreign policy undermines international norms and order, posing a threat to other countries in the region. In this sense, Latvia returns to its initial goal after gaining independence: strengthening Latvia's security and statehood.

Therefore, Andrejs Pildegovičs emphasizes that during Latvia's term on the UN Security Council, Latvia will seek to prevent Russia and its allies from exploiting the UN and its platform destructively. "The outcome of the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine will define the future of the whole UN system and the relevance of the UN Charter. Therefore, at the UN Security Council, Latvia will do its utmost to address this largest and bloodiest war in Europe of the 21st century."⁹³

However, Latvia is not going to have an easy time at the UN Security Council. Latvian diplomats are preparing for a challenging term. "Looking ahead, it must be expected that in the coming years, the UN Security Council will not have favorable conditions for seeking compromise. It is anticipated that Russia will continue its destructive activities and will seize every opportunity to

⁹² Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia (2025). *Par ko iestājas Latvija*. <https://www.mfa.gov.lv/lv/par-ko-iestajas-latvija>

⁹³ Andrejs Pildegovičs. Online interview. 06.02.2025.



Baiba Braže, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Latvia, along with other female foreign ministers in Toronto, Canada, 20.09.2024.⁹⁴ Latvia was one of the proponents of the 2022 UN General Assembly resolution on the International Day of Women in Diplomacy.⁹⁵

paralyze or reorganize the work of the UN Security Council in a manner that supports its imperialist interests and protects its allies and “clients” who are affected by specific issues on the UN Security Council’s agenda (Syria, Mali, North Korea, Iran, etc.).”⁹⁶

In particular, Latvia could have challenging moments with Russia. As one of the interviewees put it, “procedurally, Russia is

⁹⁴ Baiba Braže (2024). X post. 20.09.2024. https://x.com/braze_baiba/status/1837096779151446234?s=46&t=sh0yYG90TR6vPF3P-YUwTw

⁹⁵ United Nations General Assembly (2022). *Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 20 June 2022. International Day of Women in Diplomacy. A/RES/76/269.* <https://docs.un.org/en/A/RES/76/269>

⁹⁶ Baura, A. (2024.). *Ceļš uz ANO Drošības padomi: juridiskie un praktiskie aspekti.* In: Reire, G. (Ed.) *Latvija Apvienotajās Nācijās.* Zinātne. p. 114.

a highly sophisticated player, and I do not doubt that it will try to place Latvia in politically and legally challenging situations. Many may well hope for Latvia's failure." Therefore, Latvia must be a skillful player and focus on areas where it already demonstrates competence, such as Ukraine and gender equality.⁹⁷

One must be extremely careful in predicting the results of Latvia's membership in the UN Security Council, as the geopolitical situation is very volatile. However, Latvia will be successful in addressing its agenda issues during its two-year term on the UN Security Council, including one month as chairman in November 2026, if it manages to build coalitions and expand global understanding of the issues important to it.

As Latvia's Foreign Minister Baiba Braže notes, "Latvia emphasizes in all possible formats the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine, the global consequences of Russia's war, and the need to hold Russia accountable for its crimes in Ukraine. Latvia has consistently highlighted Russia's false narratives in international organizations and has worked to protect the integrity of information. Currently, there is an active, coordinated, and targeted campaign by Russia and other authoritarian regimes to seize control of key UN agencies, committees, and sub-organizations. These countries aim to use the UN to alter global understanding, standards, and legislation concerning human rights, media freedom, the rule of law, digital technologies, and environmental protection. We must not allow this."⁹⁸

In this context and regarding the potential of the UN Security Council, if the democratic world fails to succeed, Latvia may soon find itself not only in an organization with distorted principles and an agenda dictated by authoritarian states but also in a world where power prevails.⁹⁹ Moreover, former Latvian President

⁹⁷ Anonymous expert. Online interview. 17.02.2025.

⁹⁸ Baiba Braže. E-mail exchange. 28.03.2025.

⁹⁹ Reire, G. (2024). *Neiespējamā misija: ANO Drošības padomes reforma*. In: Reire, G. (Ed.) *Latvija Apvienotajās Nācijās*. Zinātne. p. 217.

Vaira Vīķe-Freiberga states that large, wealthy, and militarily strong nations disregard the rules they agreed to. Some countries have never committed to certain principles.¹⁰⁰ Therefore, the UN Security Council should function as a tool to limit the abuse of power and military strength, particularly against small and vulnerable states.

Ilze Žilde, Latvia's Defence Counsellor to the UN, emphasizes that "we must be visible at the Security Council. It presents a unique chance to remind us of the threats we face and to draw global attention."¹⁰¹ The Baltic region should be present in every international format that offers both direct influence and access to current information regarding the political maneuvers of the great powers.¹⁰²

Latvia's approach, in general, will focus on collaborating with its neighbors to form interest groups. Ilze Doškina, the former Executive Director of the Latvian National Committee to UNICEF, emphasizes that "we are a small region, with fewer than six million inhabitants in the Baltic. We need to address common issues and lobby accordingly. Additionally, Poland and Ukraine are wonderful partners with whom we share the experience of surviving the Soviet era. We understand their struggles and empathize with their pain."¹⁰³

The feeling of extended family transcends geographical borders. Latvia needs to maintain the values of democracy not only in the region and in Europe, but also in relations with the US.

¹⁰⁰ Reire, G. (2024). *Stikla griesti ir caurlaukti. Intervija ar Vairu Vīķi-Freibergu*. In: Reire, G. (Ed.) *Latvija Apvienotajās Nācijās*. Zinātne. p. 15.

¹⁰¹ Ilze Žilde (Defence Counsellor of the Republic of Latvia to the United Nations). Online interview. 28.02.2025.

¹⁰² Bukovskis, K. (2020). *Latvijas intereses un iespējas Apvienoto Nāciju Organizācijas Drošības padomes nepastāvīgās dalībvalsts statusā*. Latvijas Ārpolitikas institūts. p. 5. <https://www.lai.lv/publikacijas/latvijas-intereses-un-iespejas-apvienoto-naciju-organizācijas-drošības-padomes-nepastāvīgās-dalībvalsts-873>

¹⁰³ Ilze Doškina (Former Executive Director of the Latvian National Committee to UNICEF). Online interview. 12.02.2025.

Multilateralism and the rule of law, with the other EU countries on the UN Security Council in 2026, the UK, France, Denmark, and Greece, will remain a high priority, notes Andrejs Pildegovičs.¹⁰⁴

However, the challenges faced by other countries should not be overlooked. Sanita Pavļuta-Deslandes underlines that it is also crucial to uphold Latvia's values and approach to wars and conflicts in other parts of the world with the same perspective that Latvia maintains with Ukraine.¹⁰⁵ Additionally, Elina Šteinerte notes, democratic values such as the right to peaceful protest must be protected.¹⁰⁶ To that end, Latvia forms interest groups with like-minded countries that extend well beyond its immediate region.

For many years, discussions have taken place at the UN regarding the reform of the organization, particularly the Security Council. Latvia continues to advocate for UN reform, specifically for limiting the veto power held by the five permanent members of the Council (China, France, Russia, the UK, and the US), in cases of genocide and human rights issues. Andrejs Pildegovičs explains that "Latvia continuously advocates for expeditious UN reform, specifically for making the UN Security Council more accountable, transparent, and coherent. Latvia is strongly against the abuse of the veto right by the permanent members of the Council. We believe that the use of veto is not acceptable in the cases of genocide or crimes of aggression". It is possible that other, smaller reforms could be achieved, thereby enhancing the UN's effectiveness.¹⁰⁷

At the same time, discussions have stalled for several decades, and Latvia will not be the first non-permanent member of the Council to seek reforms. Latvia is willing to pursue these

¹⁰⁴ Andrejs Pildegovičs. Online interview. 06.02.2025.

¹⁰⁵ Sanita Pavļuta-Deslandes. Online interview. 14.02.2025.

¹⁰⁶ Elina Šteinerte. Online interview. 04.03.2025.

¹⁰⁷ Andrejs Pildegovičs. Online interview. 06.02.2025.

reforms, but it will be complicated to agree on.¹⁰⁸ However, in recent years, as Zinta Zommers notes, the number of resolutions proposed and approved by the ten elected members of the UN Security Council has grown.¹⁰⁹ Latvia also belongs to the Accountability, Coherence and Transparency Group (ACT), which is convinced of the need to consolidate the strengths of the Security Council's working methods, address fundamental flaws, and build on innovations made, as well as offer solutions to make the Council more open, effective, and fit for its purpose. For example, Liechtenstein, in close cooperation with Latvia and other countries, achieved the adoption of a General Assembly resolution on enhanced accountability of the veto power at the Security Council.¹¹⁰

Additionally, the growing importance of cybersecurity is evident. Jānis Kārklīņš emphasizes that the security of critical infrastructure is becoming increasingly significant for Latvia due to recent events in the Baltic Sea.¹¹¹ Telecommunications cables have been cut in the Baltic Sea near the coast of Latvia.¹¹² In Latvia's opinion, the UN Security Council must address the whole spectrum of the 21st-century threats to global peace and security. It must tackle the traditional types of warfare, curb the spread of sexual violence in armed conflicts, and deal with the emerging threats in cybersecurity, artificial intelligence, and the information space. Andrejs Pildegovičs underlines that he is convinced that one of the Nordic-Baltic States must always be on the UN Security Council to represent our region, voice our concerns, and

¹⁰⁸ Anonymous expert. Online interview. 17.02.2025.

¹⁰⁹ Zinta Zommers. Online interview. 05.03.2025.

¹¹⁰ United Nations General Assembly (2022). *Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 26 April 2022. Standing mandate for a General Assembly debate when a veto is cast in the Security Council*. https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65B-FCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/A_RES_76_262.pdf

¹¹¹ Jānis Kārklīņš. Online interview. 14.02.2025.

¹¹² Eng.lsm.lv (2025). *LVRTC cable damage*. <https://eng.lsm.lv/topic/lurtc-cable-damage/>

offer our perspectives and solutions to the pressing challenges.¹¹³ Additionally, the fight against disinformation will be prioritized.¹¹⁴

To conclude, the UN faces many challenges. Kristofers Krūmiņš, the UN Youth Delegate of Latvia in 2024, noted the limited number of discussions that bear notable practical relevance,¹¹⁵ or the unwillingness of all countries to make their regular contributions. Consequently, as Elina Šteinerte notes, some projects do not receive the necessary funding, which leaves the organization weaker and unable to meet global expectations.¹¹⁶

¹¹³ Andrejs Pildegovičs. Online interview. 06.02.2025.

¹¹⁴ Ruduša, R. (2024). *Vārdu un vērtību cīņa UNESCO*. In: Reire, G. (Ed.) *Latvija Apvienotajās Nācijās*. Zinātne. p. 51.

¹¹⁵ Kristofers Krūmiņš. Online interview. 27.02.2025.

¹¹⁶ Elina Šteinerte. Online interview. 04.03.2025.

Conclusions: Evolving from Aid Recipient to Contributor

Is a world without the UN possible? This question has been raised for a long time, but in recent years, particularly in light of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, it has received even more attention in Latvia and beyond. The UN is not a perfect organization. The inability to prevent and stop many wars, famines, and other misfortunes that fall upon humanity is often levelled at the UN. However, nothing better than the UN has been invented. The UN represents a significant improvement over the League of Nations from the inter-war period, which, despite its merits, was unable to prevent World War II. The UN has endured for almost eight decades. Additionally, many of the UN's achievements in mediating conflicts, peacekeeping, feeding refugees, fighting epidemics, and much more have received insufficient attention.

In 2025, Latvia marks the 34th anniversary of its admission to the UN. Back in September 1991, Latvia had just gained international recognition and faced the daunting task of rebuilding the country from scratch after five decades of foreign occupations. Institutions such as the armed forces and diplomatic corps had to be established from the ground up. Meanwhile, Russia's armed

forces were still stationed in Latvia. Fast forward to 2025, and Latvia is, in many ways, an integral part of the collective West. It is a member of the EU, including its Eurozone and Schengen zone, and of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), as well as NATO. Instead of an army from the former colonizer, the Soviet Union, in the early 1990s, Latvia now hosts a NATO brigade-sized unit intended to deter Russia's aggression.

In parallel, Latvia has followed a very similar path of growth within the UN. It initially sought membership in various UN agencies, adopted best practices and standards developed by UN entities, and its diplomats, politicians, and other officials learned from the UN playbook as well as from other UN member states. Consequently, Latvia gradually transformed from a recipient to a donor. It increasingly offered voluntary contributions to various UN causes and began participating in UN peacekeeping missions. Latvia also broadened the scale and scope of its activities beyond its immediate interests. More Latvian experts were employed by the UN, and others were elected to different UN bodies. Latvian companies gradually increased their earnings from UN contracts to the point where their financial gains surpassed Latvia's mandatory contributions to the UN budget. Ultimately, in 2025, Latvia was elected to serve as a member of the UN Security Council for the following two years.

To be fair, Latvia's development and path at the UN are not unique. Its immediate neighbors, Estonia and Lithuania, have followed very similar trajectories, and in many indicators, surpass Latvia. Both neighbors have already served on the UN Security Council. Among EU member states, Latvia is only ahead of Cyprus in gaining a seat at the Security Council table. In a broader historical perspective, Latvia held a non-permanent seat on the Council of the League of Nations from 1936 to 1939, achieving this merit less than two decades after gaining independence in 1918.

Latvia will join the UN Security Council during a turbulent and pivotal time. It will be among the staunchest advocates for

Ukraine and the shared values of democracies. Noting the recent transformation of US foreign policy, Latvia will need to find a balance in maintaining good relations with the US, its strategic partner, while also strengthening US-EU relations, thereby enhancing the transatlantic link. Crises in the Middle East, in Africa, and other regions where Latvia has been less visible thus far will also become more significant parts of Latvian diplomats' daily agendas. The long-awaited reforms of the UN Security Council and the UN as a whole will present another challenge. Furthermore, setting up the UN Security Council agenda will require at least nine affirmative votes from the quite diverse 15 members of the Council. Consequently, Latvia's work in the UN Security Council will likely enhance its expertise on topics that were previously less familiar and cultivate understanding of toward issues that may seem unrelated.

Back at home, Latvian diplomats will have to explain and justify the immersion in various distant regions and issues, many of which will not directly concern ordinary compatriots. They will also have a hard time explaining the effectiveness of the UN and its benefits.

Author Information

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The Center for Geopolitical Studies Riga is an independent research think-tank that is based in Latvia. It focuses on security dilemmas and geopolitical rivalries in the Baltic Sea region and beyond.

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Latvia at the UN: From Aid Recipient to Contributor

This publication reviews three decades of Latvia's membership in the United Nations (UN), during which Latvia has gradually matured and transformed from an aid recipient to a contributor within the organization and beyond. It traces Latvia's journey in the UN from its accession in 1991 to 2025, when Latvia was elected to the UN Security Council.

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