

Annual Report of the Minister of Foreign Affairs
on
the accomplishments and further work with respect to national foreign policy
and the European Union
2017

Introduction

This report aims at presenting an outline of the main directions in national foreign policy. Latvia's interests lie in the preservation and development of the current international system. Latvia's independence and security are promoted by the existing global order based on common values and international law, membership in the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), a strong European Union, Euro-Atlantic cooperation with the United States of America (USA) and Canada with respect to security and in economic affairs.

The prosperity of our state depends on its economic competitiveness in the European and global markets; with this in mind, Latvian businesses should be supported in the areas where they are successful and in new and untraditional markets. Latvia includes all its people regardless of whether they live in Latvia or beyond its borders. Therefore, the strengthening of the sense of belonging to the country and the link between the state of Latvia and its diaspora is a vital task of Latvia's foreign policy.

Latvia is situated in the Baltic-Nordic region. It is in Latvia's interests to use this format of cooperation and to strengthen cooperation within the European Union in the areas in which the Nordic-Baltic Eight (NB8) has a shared and closely related political vision. This format offers good opportunities for deepening cooperation with other European regions, including the Benelux countries. Common security interests of the NB8 include wanting to see the US and the United Kingdom demonstrate their long-term interest in the security of the Baltic Sea region. This prompts the need for strengthening the political cooperation between the NB8, and the US and the United Kingdom.

Present-day foreign policy challenges

The strongest challenge to Latvia in terms of foreign policy is the current rapid changes to the international order – changes caused by the fall of the Iron Curtain. The post-war end of Western colonialism initiated conditions conducive for changes in the global power structure. The collapse of the Soviet Union eliminated the bipolar power structure of the global order. The global economic structure is currently being changed by the rapid economic growth of China, India, the Republic of Korea, and the South American and Southeast Asian countries.

The global accessibility of modern technologies and technical knowledge challenges the existing model of national economies and shifts the balance from traditional economies to the sources of globalized economic development characteristic of the 21st century.

Russia's aggressive attempts to change the current European security architecture by seeking to reduce the impact of the EU and NATO should be regarded as a challenge to security at the national and international levels alike. These are challenges for which the current global order created in the wake of World War II and the Cold War have proved to be too narrow.

The existing system of norms and values governing international relations, when confronted with present-day realities, sometimes proves to be less capable of dealing with the increasing threats and rising populism. This undermines public trust and support. We are now living in a social and technological environment different from the one in the recent past, and there is every reason to acknowledge the advent of societies of great opportunities but high risk.

We can observe both fundamental systemic risks, as was demonstrated by the global financial and economic crisis and climate change, including as well, international terrorism, mass migration, pandemics and the spread of weapons of mass destruction, and the counter posing aspects, namely, opportunities for intensive social and economic development, created by the rapid increase of innovations in the areas of genetics, nanotechnologies, big data, cloud computing and artificial intelligence.

Threats in the 21st century are not only of a military nature. The functioning of advanced contemporary societies depends on the resilience of the state and society against external influences, and on the quality of protection of information and communication systems, the security of infrastructure critical for the state and society, and media literacy among the general public.

We live in a time when a combination of modern technologies, social networks, economic pressure and the legal system ensured by Western democracies are used by external forces to influence and distort democratic processes in various countries. We should also highlight such threats that are derived from human rights violations, corrupt practices and money laundering by undemocratic countries; these strategies and methods are used to gain influence and increase risks to other countries.

At the same time, Russia's military activities alongside the country's aggressive foreign policy should also be considered. The strengthening of national defence capabilities is a vital part of national security.

A defining element that characterizes present-day conflicts has broadened to include information and communications technologies. Consequently, information warfare emerges as a special element of hybrid warfare, part of which, by means of various propaganda tools and manipulative techniques, has an impact on public attitudes toward socio-economic, political and identity issues. Latvia's ability to deal with hybrid threats is as important as the military capabilities possessed by the state.

Europe and the US should be capable of responding to and building their future perspective both in the geopolitical context, which includes the issues of territorial defence and military force, and in the context of global governance, which covers the questions of human rights, the rule of law, media freedom, nuclear disarmament, trade liberalisation, and other issues. The future of Western world also depends on its ability to strengthen the societal resilience against hybrid threats.

Present-day challenges to Europe's future and its values stem not only from external influence but also internal processes in the European Union itself; a clear indicator of the challenges is increasing populism, which exploits anti-elite themes. Playing on people's hopes, concerns and fears, such forces are aiming to weaken democratic processes and to reduce the importance of democratic values. Taking these factors into account, a change in democratic values clearly is a path to a deep crisis in society.

Various visions for the future development of the European Union have been outlined, stemming from a clear assessment of global, regional and national challenges. Alongside the Bratislava Declaration and Roadmap, and the Rome Declaration, that provides a focused vision of the EU's priorities in the short-term and long-term future, the European Commission, in its White Paper in 2017, provided scenarios for creating a possible path for the future of Europe. It was followed by the Commission's offer of how to ensure a fair social environment for Europeans; to increase the European Union's global impact, to deepen the European Union's economic and monetary union, to strengthen Europe's defence capabilities, and to shape EU finances in the future.

With the various types of threats proliferating and changing, Euro-Atlantic security calls for not only effective transatlantic cooperation but also a strong European identity in security and defence. European security is composed of three elements. First, it is a security architecture determined by such factors as the power and interests of the Member States. Second, the security regime is also determined by functional factors – the governance of common norms and institutions. Third, it comprises ideational-related factors – identity and values. Latvia's security in the European Union should also be seen in the context of clearly defined foreign policy interests of the European Union, including upholding international law and a strong European identity.

Latvia stands for such a security and defence policy of the European Union that does not duplicate NATO but complements it.

Democratic values and international justice

Latvia's independence and sustainable security is rooted in universal values and an international order based on the principles of international justice. Since the restoration of independence, Latvia has been advocating compliance with international law and human rights. The protection of these principles and fundamental values was needed both when restoring Latvia's independence de facto, in the transition to a democratic society governed by the rule of law, and in building Latvia's image internationally. Another manifestation of the importance of international law is that it determines the existence of countries and their borders, and due to this, international law was the grounds for restoring Latvia's independence. Within the meaning of this law the state of Latvia continued existing throughout the occupation period.

Shared values bring separate individuals together into one society. Such values form the basis for a modern, democratic European society, including Latvia. Latvia is part of the Western value system that gives it confidence characteristic of that system with respect to the values of a democratic and law-governed state, namely, the existence and development of a national culture, humanism, rationality, secularity, rule of law, democracy and human rights. In discussions on Europe's future, Latvia will seek to strengthen, not downplay those values.

Today, the international reputation of a country reflects its national system of values, which should promote and not thwart the country's international interests. It should be borne in mind that foreign direct investment of different quality is attracted depending on the country's reputation.

Latvia advocates compliance with international law and all the applicable "rules of conduct" which promote predictability and consequently, also stability and security. Respect for international law inhibits arbitrariness, and it is in the interests of our country to foster observance of international law so that Latvia could rely on the protection it provides.

Latvia's priorities in international organisations are the observance of human rights, including the rights of national minorities and other minority groups, ensuring freedom of speech, as well as gender equality, which reflect the values and experiences of Latvian society. In the context of respect for international law, Latvia welcomes the persecution of the most serious crimes – crimes against humanity, war crimes and genocide.

Media freedom is an integral part of democracy and pluralism, which in the contemporary security environment should counter propaganda hostile to the country. Latvia's support for the principles of international law and human rights, positions the country as a responsible partner in international cooperation. Therefore, Latvia stands for strengthening the role of the UN, the OSCE and the Council of Europe.

On these grounds, Latvia supports the mechanism of peaceful resolution of disputes, including the strengthening of international and regional courts. This is confirmed by the law recently passed by the *Saeima* (the Latvian parliament), "On Recognition of the Jurisdiction of the International Court of Justice".

By recognizing the compulsory jurisdiction of the International Court of Justice, Latvia undoubtedly positions itself as a country governed by the rule of law. This clearly testifies to Latvia's maturity, from a legal point of view, in the eyes of the international community and its foreign partners, whilst accenting its stability and preparedness to seek the resolution of contentious issues in this international institution.

For Latvia, this is a significant political signal in the context of the international community, since a rules-based dispute resolution regime is important for Latvia and, in particular, when Latvia has applied for a seat as a permanent member of the UN Security Council for 2026-2027. Work in the UN Security Council provides a country with an excellent platform for the protection of its interests and values, promoting nation branding internationally, strengthening contacts and reinforcing its institutional capacity. This is a matter of Latvia's security interests, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs intends to systematically devote close attention to this priority in the coming years. Latvia supports initiatives aimed at achieving more effective work of the UN Security Council, preventing the use of the veto in cases involving mass crimes, and restoring trust in the Security Council as an institution, the mission of which is to ensure peace and security worldwide.

The Security Council should adapt to the present-day geopolitical realities, including by expanding its membership in both the permanent and non-permanent categories. Latvia will

continue actively to take part in the work of both regional and sectoral organisations, and presenting its candidacy for seats on the leading institutions of those organisations.

International law recognizes the territorial inviolability of states, and it is vitally important for Latvia that this principle be observed, it being closely related to Latvia's security. Therefore, Latvia firmly opposes Russia's aggression in Ukraine, since any compromise of territorial inviolability undermines that principle, thereby inciting further violations and creating potential threats – also to Latvia. Latvia stands by the existing peace order in Europe, the rule of law, territorial integrity, international cooperation and non-intervention in domestic affairs of states. At the same time, Latvia respects the right of nations to self-determination in line with criteria and practice as laid down in international law.

At a time when we are facing challenges caused by hybrid threats to Latvia's security, respect for international law and human rights is also the matter of security and resilience of the Latvian state. The level of compliance with the rule of law has a direct impact on growth prospects for the country.

The place of Latvia in a united, free and secure Europe

The prospects for a Europe with several levels of integration are increasing today, which would enable closer cooperation between countries that are prepared to do so. It is in Latvia's interest to be part of the core EU integration, not to stay at its periphery. To achieve closer integration, Latvia supports focusing on closer cooperation in the areas of defence, internal security, energy and transport, a strengthened Euro Area as well as the convergence of living standards across the European Union (cohesion policy). At present, the European Union has a chance to make itself over and become more united and cohesive in political terms.

Latvia supports serious reforms in the European Union by engaging actively in their formulation and implementation.

Future Europe

The European Union is not only a union of European states built on the basis of legal principles and accords. Foremost, it is a space of shared European values rooted in a common historical and cultural heritage and a global view. The strengthening of European Union values – equality, the rule of law, human rights, including minority rights, pluralism, tolerance, justice and gender equality – is essential for Latvia. Second, the EU is a unique platform for advancing Latvia's security and economic interests. In view of this, Latvia supports a European Union as a union of strong national states, a union that closely cooperates in areas which are in the interest of its Member States and the Union as a whole, as well as in effectively defending its interests globally.

In 2016, the European Union encountered turbulences caused by the referendum on the future membership of the United Kingdom in the European Union (the Brexit process): as well as the result of the increasing influence of populist political parties in the Member States, the extremely high level of uncontrolled migration, protectionism, social and economic inequality and

terrorism. Meanwhile, the past year brought greater clarity and predictability to the EU-related agenda, especially with respect to the matter of the European Union's further strategic course. Under the complicated international and internal political situation, the European Union has succeeded in focusing on strategic priorities common for the 27 Member States, while retaining unity within shared interests and values. This is in line with Latvia's national interests.

Although current negotiations between the European Union and the United Kingdom on the withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the European Union have been very complicated, the achievements, nevertheless, are sufficient for the parties to begin the next phase of the talks on the transition period, which should provide a model for their future relationship. The provisional agreement currently achieved safeguards rights of European Union citizens living in the United Kingdom, including their entitlement to accrued pensions.

The agreement achieved also ensures that the United Kingdom will make payments on its liabilities to the European Union until 2020. The agreement complies with Latvia's interests since it opens a path for close and strategic relations between the European Union and the United Kingdom in the future, which includes as close as possible cooperation in economic matters, trade, science, education and security.

Nevertheless, it should be emphasised that the negotiations between both parties will continue with other aspects of mutual interest and the final agreement on specific topics – withdrawal-related issues, the transitional period and the framework for future relationship – is conditional on an agreement concerning all aspects of UK and EU relations.

Latvia's future in the European Union

Latvia wishes to see a united, effective and fully functional European Union based on the participation of its citizens, including those of Latvia. With this in mind, Latvia's activities have been aimed at promoting reforms in the European Union, especially stronger socio-economic integration, competitiveness, security and defence, as well as the development of the European Monetary Union. The European Union should be able to play a significant role in shaping the global economic order, which can be far easier achieved if the euro gains stability as a global currency.

Opportunities offered by the European Union's single market

The European Union's single market is a unique foundation for sustainable growth and modernisation of the economy of Latvia. Not only does the single market ensure good prospects for business, it also protects Latvia's economy from negative external influences generated in other markets and regions.

The opportunities offered by the single market are far from being exhausted. Latvia's economic policy is aligned to ensure the country well integrated into the single market. Latvia's interests lie in initiatives targeting improvement of the functioning of the goods and services sector and reducing obstacles to cross-border business, as well as compliance with the principles of free movement of labour and of services, while also facilitating job creation. It is in Latvia's interests

that these fundamental freedoms of the European Union are equally applied to all Member States thereby safeguarding equal rights for all EU citizens in order that they can make use of the opportunities offered by the single market.

Being part of the single market also means ensuring that the rules regulating the single market are promoting instead of hindering its development. Latvia was, and will be interested in seeking regional synergies between the European Union Member States. A good example of that is the formation of a uniform understanding among the Nordic and Baltic States – members of the European Union - about the social issues of the European Union's Single Market, and in respect of the Ministerial Declaration, "The Nordic-Baltic region: a digital frontrunner".

Latvia has been interested in promoting European Union agreements on the establishment of an open and integrated Digital Single Market. Latvia has set the goal of becoming a "data driven country", as an integrated Digital Single Market is instrumental for the modernisation, growth and competitiveness of our country. Likewise, a digitally competent Latvian society will help to ensure the needed defence against the present-day threats, cyber threats being the principal one in this respect.

Latvia should accomplish this task in the format of the Baltic-Nordic region, which is the most developed region in the European Union in terms of digitalisation and which can encourage other regions of the European Union along that path. In 2017, the Nordic-Baltic Ministerial Conference on Digitalisation adopted a joint Ministerial Declaration, aimed at developing an increasingly effective digital single market in the Baltic-Nordic region, which in turn will promote digitalisation across Europe.

A European Defence Union

Recent geopolitical developments have proved the need for the European Union to reinforce its defence capabilities and that it should become more united and more capable of protecting itself, while avoiding duplication with NATO and by not reducing the importance of the transatlantic link. This goal is in line with Latvia's security interests.

Closer cooperation between the European Union and NATO is vital in relation to a number of other security challenges: NATO should remain responsible for collective defence, while the European Union's defence dimension should cover the areas which could increase European security and in which the European Union can perform better. Those are civilian missions and military operations, provision of additional support for partner countries, promotion of resilience against present-day threats, the fight against hybrid threats, and cyber-security.

Latvia's interests lie in inclusive Member State cooperation at the EU level; therefore, Latvia supports a strong Permanent Structured Cooperation on security and defence (PESCO). It should ensure opportunities for regional cooperation between the European Union Member States and the development of national capabilities, which will complement the capability development planned by NATO. The EU's CARD, the mechanism for coordination of the European Union defence capabilities, should be synchronised with NATO's defence planning process.

Given the deterioration of security situation in Europe's neighbourhood, the need for the European Union to undertake its own military stabilisation missions is expected to increase in the

future, through the deployment of the European Union Battlegroups. Latvia supports such development within European defence identity and emphasises that the usability of the European Union Battlegroups should be increased.

The newly established European Defence Fund will also enhance European security. The fund will ensure the European Union's financing of collaborative projects of Member States in research and development of military technologies and in programmes for jointly creating and purchasing weapons systems. Latvia advocates the kind of the Defence Fund policy that would create opportunities for Latvia's small and medium-sized companies to be part of the military industry supply chains.

The social dimension of the European Union

The overall goal of the European Union is to ensure the welfare and security of its citizens. However, significant differences in living standards between the European Union Member States and regions are still present. At this point, the European Union Member States including Latvia are increasingly facing challenges posed by changing employment opportunities, increasing digitalisation and commensurate skills development, social disparities, ageing, and the sustainability of public finances.

The pressure of global competition with respect to goods and services on the European Union is growing. Latvia's economy is increasingly impacted by such sectors as communication, informatics and administrative services, which require a well-educated and highly professional and skilled workforce. Consequently, the quality of education, including lifelong education, needs to be made more accessible in Latvia and the level of social protection of the population will increasingly be pre-requisites for a competitive national economy.

The aim of ensuring the wellbeing and security for the people of the European Union should go hand in hand with an effective social and welfare policy. Consequently, Latvia has supported and acceded to the twenty principles of the European Pillar of Social Rights proclaimed in Gothenburg. By taking this step, the European Union underlines that it will also remain a socially responsible union in the future.

As concerns the European Union's social dimension, Latvia is in favour of ambitious, but realistic goals. Trust in EU ideas is undermined and populism grows when only declaratory promises are made and when social disparities increase. Although it is in the competence of Member States to formulate their employment and social policies for the convergence of living standards and to enable their citizens to adapt to changes brought about by the global economy, it is vital for Member States to have a common vision of what a social policy should be like in the 21st century.

Therefore, Latvia supports the approach followed by the European Commission in devising the principles of the European Pillar of Social Rights, while being aware that the models of social security systems in the Member States differ. Latvia will oppose any attempts at changing the system of granting social assistance benefits, which could have a negative influence on Latvian nationals.

Strengthening the energy policy

Latvia supports the strengthening of the European Union's energy policy in a way that promotes security, competitiveness and sustainability of energy supplies while reducing the environmental impact of the energy sector. At a time when political instability and unpredictability is increasing in the regions which have traditionally been of strategic importance for energy supply to the global market – the Middle East, North Africa, Venezuela, Russia – the emerging energy union should both secure the modernisation of the European Union economies and improve energy security in its Member States.

Latvia, together with its regional partners, has already done a great deal to strengthen energy policy and energy security on the path from an 'energy island' to a connected energy market attractive for businesses and with competing diversified supply sources, for instance, through joining the Nord Pool multinational exchange for trading electric power and building interconnections between the Baltic States and Finland, Sweden, and Poland. It is in the interests of Latvia's energy security that in 2018 an agreement be achieved, which will ensure synchronisation of the Baltic States power grids with those of Central Europe, taking into account the safety of the system and its long-term impact on overall costs and tariffs.

In addition, improvements to the Baltic natural gas infrastructure and liberalisation of the Latvian natural gas market have enabled new trends and increased competition in the regional natural gas market. This is strengthening the region's energy security and independence. Participation in the implementation of the European Energy Union strategy will be an excellent opportunity for continued structural and high-quality modernisation of Latvia's national economy by means of improving Latvian and regional energy infrastructure and its legal framework, by more closely integrating into the European energy market, as well as by attracting new participants to this sector.

Given that Latvia is strategically targeting cooperation with its neighbours – the European Union and NATO members in the region, Latvia has been, and remains, opposed to projects of the Nordstream II type. They are contrary to the principles of the European Energy Union; they will interfere with the modernisation of the European Economic Union and reduce Europe's security. Projects of this kind undermine energy security and geopolitical security in Latvia and Europe.

The transport sector

The transit and logistics sector in the Latvian economy accounts for almost one fourth of its services sector. Therefore, increased attention will be devoted to its development, and its competitiveness will be improved, with new development opportunities sought, risks diversified, new markets explored and new customers and new cargo flows attracted.

The near-term priority is the development of Latvia's logistical infrastructure for goods with a higher value added, as is container transportation in the Eurasian space, as well as the use of container trains and the development of the logistics and distribution sector in the Baltic States and Scandinavia using Latvia's warehousing and logistics services.

In terms of investments, it is essential to establish new companies for the development of ports infrastructure, to develop projects with a higher value added, as well as logistical and industrial

projects by making use of opportunities offered by free ports and special economic zones. Latvia has many attractive investments on offer in the ports, logistics and aviation sectors.

It is in Latvia's interests to undertake European transport projects which are important both for Latvia and the European Union, that would receive funding from the EU's post-2020 Multiannual Financial Framework. The European Union's budget should include Rail Baltica, the most significant transport infrastructure project in the Baltic States currently carried out by Latvia jointly with the region's countries. The project will integrate the Baltic States into the European Union's common rail network. Rail Baltica will serve as a strong catalyser for sustainable development in the Baltic States and will establish a new transport corridor, by creating a new mobility standard concerning passenger and cargo transportation, and by developing new delivery chains in the logistics sector, promoting tourism, facilitating employment and overall economic development.

Reducing migration risks

High illegal migration as well as related organised crime and human trafficking is a challenge for the entire European Union, including its Member States in the Baltic Sea region. Inability to find a solution to this problem in a timely manner is a cause of social tensions in European Union Member States and increases the spread of political populism. Accordingly, political instability and social tensions can continue to proliferate, leaving a negative influence on the European Union.

In its policies, Latvia is guided by the vision that solutions to migration problems in the European Union lie in a comprehensive solidarity-based policy. Therefore, Latvia has been active in supporting the strengthening the management of the EU's external borders, with its participation in joint operations of the European Border and Coast Guard Agency. Latvia believes that an effective implementation of a migrant return policy is possible in close cooperation with the countries of transit and origin. Latvia also takes part in the work of the European Asylum Support Office, providing support for the EU Member States in following the established asylum procedure. The next task will be to find an effective mechanism of controlling illegal migration along the Central Mediterranean route.

Latvia's policy with respect to the reform of the European asylum system stems from the conviction that solidarity measures cannot be made mandatory and the mechanisms for distribution of asylum seekers must be based on a voluntary commitment.

The European Union, as it grants asylum rights, should balance those with Europe's security interests and the need for those who are granted asylum to recognise, comply with and respect fundamental European values. The ability to find and maintain this fragile balance is the critical to the success of an effective European Union migration policy and the resolution of the current migration crisis.

The European Union's enlargement and neighbourhood policy

Latvia supports the enlargement of the European Union and welcomes the candidacy of the Western Balkan countries, this being in Latvia's long-term interests, and in the interest of the security and stability of the region. Latvia supports enlargement that is based on the enduring political stability of these countries, as well as their fulfilment of strong criteria, based on their

individual performance in the fulfilment of those criteria. Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo are potential candidates, while Montenegro, Serbia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, and Albania are official candidate countries.

A European perspective is a motivating instrument, that promotes positive changes toward the strengthening of democracy and a strong legal environment, and that increases public welfare. A European Union perspective for the Western Balkans also promotes good neighbourly relations, regional cooperation, peace and stability, all of which is of special importance considering both the region's history and the current complicated domestic situation in all the Western Balkans countries, which poses a threat to the region's security and stability.

Latvia supports the continuation of negotiations with Turkey on the country's accession to the European Union. Turkey, on its course towards the European Union, should be able to fulfil all the set criteria, notably, to meet the standards of democracy, the rule of law and human rights. The process of accession negotiations will serve as an effective instrument for the fulfilment of the criteria in the areas of concern.

In its relationship with the Eastern Partnership countries – Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine – Latvia advocates granting a clear European perspective to the countries which aspire to join the European Union pursuant to Article 49 of the Treaty of Lisbon. So far, Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova have expressed an active interest, and these countries should be able to undertake reforms that would bring them closer to the European Union standards and meet the EU level in political, legal and economic terms. In this process, the emphasis should be placed on respect for the fundamental principles of democracy and human rights, while respecting the specific character of the development of these countries. The European Union Association Agreements should be regarded in this context as a motivating and effective preparatory instrument. In its cooperation with the Eastern Partnership countries, Latvia supports adherence to the principle of flexibility, or a differentiated approach to each Eastern Partnership country, as well as building individual cooperation arrangements with the countries which have not expressed their intention to join the European Union. At the same time, Latvia strongly advocates the right of countries to choose their own course in foreign policy and opposes any attempts at imposing restrictive options on societies concerning their future development.

Development cooperation

It is vital for Latvia's security and prosperity that regions that are located close to it, and to the European Union, are stable, secure and predictable. One of the best foreign policy instruments for performing this task is development cooperation policy, and Latvia contributes to strengthening the role of the European Union as a global player in this field. A wiser use of development assistance instruments, which would help address the root causes of the flow of illegal economic migrants, is in the long-term security interests of the European Union.

Latvia's foreign policy aims at building a united and free Europe, which includes close and active relations between the European Union and its neighbours. In accordance with the Development Cooperation Policy Guidelines for 2016–2020, priority development partners for Latvia are countries of the Eastern Partnership and Central Asia. Ukraine, Georgia, and Moldova are priority countries in Europe, and Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan in Central Asia.

Three sectors of engagement have been identified for each of these countries in those areas which are aligned with the political priorities of the cooperation partner and in which Latvia has considerable expertise and experience.

Latvian experts are raising the capacity of public administration in the Eastern Partnership countries by promoting democratic participation, taking part in the improvement of regional policy and in strengthening the export sector. With Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine, having clearly formulated their objectives in the context of European integration, one of the priorities for Latvia in development cooperation is to strengthen the capacity of these countries to implement European Union standards. Development cooperation projects not only make these countries more stable and secure economically, but also increase the possibility that these countries will reap economic benefits from their relationship with the European Union's Single Market. Under these conditions foreign investors face lower investment risks and new business opportunities.

In the Central Asian region, the focus of Latvia's development cooperation is on strengthening the system of justice and home affairs, a focus that helps to reinforce the borders of the region's countries. Security problems in Afghanistan, which borders these countries, posed by international terrorism and illegal drug trafficking, is a serious threat to the security of these countries and to Latvia's interests. Therefore, development cooperation should target the areas that are vital for security, stability and economic growth in the Central Asian region.

Latvia's perspective of the foreign policy priorities of the European Union in the context of the next EU budget

In 2018, the European Commission will reveal its vision of the European Union's next budget for the post-2020 period. It will be influenced by the Member States' visions of the future of the European Union. It should be noted that since the approval of the previous budget, the European Union has encountered new challenges in the field of security caused by the high level of illegal migration and the deteriorating security environment in the Union's neighbourhood.

Latvia supports the principle that, when allocating funding for the European Union's new priorities, the new amount should be balanced with funding for current priorities. This is of special importance because the goal of convergence, of reducing disparities between the European Union Member States, has not been achieved yet. Under the conditions of the European Single Market, all Member States – both net contributors and those which receive more from the EU budget than they pay in –benefit from convergence. This will promote unity and efficiency of the European Union. Convergence will also be promoted by an EU project, Rail Baltica, and the Horizon 2020 and Erasmus+ programmes.

At the same time, it is vital for the European Union's post-2020 budget to also be optimal for the development of a reformed European Union, that encourages growth that in turn ensures budgetary revenues needed for other priorities, including convergence.

The European Union's new post-2020 budget should find an effective balance between funding for the reduction of disparities in regional development, for the Common Agricultural Policy, and for the new challenges faced by the European Union, including the reduction of migration risks, and for meeting the European Union's security and defence objectives. Brexit and the new

challenges faced by the European Union have created pressure to reduce the total amount of the EU Multiannual Financial Framework and to reallocate the funding amounts between various priorities. Latvia's interests lie in maintaining the financing needed to level out disparities in economic development and for Latvian agriculture, while also supporting sufficient funding for the European Union's new priorities, which could enhance the Union's long-term prospects and its ability to be competitive in the 21st century. The total amount of the European Union's next budget must be maintained at least at the present funding level, while being aware that this implies responsible decisions by EU Member States in budgeting.

At the same time, Latvia regards it as essential that the European Union's budget ensure permanent economic growth of the Union. The European Union must ensure equal economic development without leaving individual Member States in uncompetitive conditions.

Euro-Atlantic relations and Latvia's security

Latvia's security, if compared to security in the interwar period and before Latvia joined the European Union and NATO, has considerably increased. Europe has undergone a transition from a continent ravaged by wars triggered by the conflicting interests of great powers to a continent dominated by intergovernmental cooperation and integration. However, Russia's aggressive foreign policy is causing increasing concerns. As a result of Euro-Atlantic cooperation, Europe is much more capable of addressing traditional and new security challenges.

NATO's ability to ensure the territorial defence of the allies, combined with the positive impact of the European Union on political and economic stability of the continent is the basis of Latvia's security. NATO allies provide a major contribution to the strengthening of Latvia's security and defence by deployment of the Alliance's rapid reaction forces in the Baltic States, a measure which enhances deterrence. It is in Latvia's interests to sustain their presence in the long term, depending on the security situation in Europe. European security requires constant attention and what has been achieved in terms of Latvia's security must be protected and strengthened. NATO defence capabilities and the cooperation model set up in the Baltic Sea region following Russia's aggression against Ukraine must be sustained depending on the level of threat in the region.

Latvia is interested in advancing mutual coordination in the field of security among the nine Central and Eastern European countries, or the Bucharest Nine – Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Poland, Romania, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Hungary and in strengthening common security interests of NATO and the European Union. Such cooperation includes cooperation in the European Common Security and Defence Policy and in the field of hybrid threats and cyber security, as well as coordination in the framework of NATO, the European Union and the OSCE.

Challenges to security in the Euro-Atlantic space

The global and European security infrastructure created after World War II – UN, NATO, the European Union, the OSCE and the Council of Europe – serve Latvia's interests, and it should be enhanced. Unlike in the inter-war period, the countries of the Baltic Sea region have developed strong regional and bilateral cooperation. Latvia's interests, in particular, lie in cooperation in the

Baltic States format and the Baltic-Nordic format. Those are countries linked by close economic, political and security interests, values and a shared vision of European Union policies.

Latvia has proved itself a trustworthy and responsible partner that contributes to European and global security with respect to decision formulation and decision-making processes and by the input of its own resources in the implementations of those decisions. Latvian troops take part in NATO, the European Union and the UN (Mali) operations. Civilian experts work in the European Union and OSCE missions in Ukraine and Georgia: they contribute to ending these protracted conflicts and in reforming these countries' public administration.

Even if the current threat of international terrorism to Latvia is low, Latvia is by no means isolated from its impact. Latvia, being part of the European Union and NATO, has an obligation to control the risks related to terrorism financing on an ongoing basis. The increasing international mobility of the population of Latvia can increase the possibility of being adversely affected by terrorist activities. Latvia is interested in engaging in the fight against terrorism.

As proved by security challenges caused by North Korea, no country is large and powerful enough or isolated by natural barriers to the extent that it would be fully shielded from those challenges. Latvia, when adopting a decision on the procedure for imposing a national sanctions regime, supports intensified sanctions imposed by the United Nations Security Council on North Korea.

Relations with the Russian Federation

One of the main reasons for the deteriorating security situation in Europe is the confrontational course chosen by Russia vis-à-vis the West. Instead of cooperation, preference is given to destructive actions, including aggression against Georgia in 2008, aggression against Ukraine in 2014, in disregard of the sovereignty of these states and their internationally recognised borders. Russia's policy in Syria has made it more difficult to find a solution to the conflict. Russia is systematically pursuing a policy of economic protectionism, which impedes the operations of foreign businesses, including those from Latvia.

At present, nothing indicates that Russia's foreign policy could change for the better. This means that Russia's option in favour of confrontation and sustained tension in its relationship with the West has a long-term character.

Further steps towards the strengthening of Latvia's defence will include measures boosting its capabilities that prevent a potential adversary from impeding access of NATO Allies to the Baltic States and Poland whose aim is to provide support to its Baltic and Polish Allies on land, in the air and at sea. The NATO Baltic Air Policing mission should be transitioned into NATO's air defence system, and Allied naval presence in the Baltic Sea should be reinforced.

Latvia is interested in a dialogue with Russia based on unconditional respect for the ten principles of the Helsinki Final Act, but avoiding the creation of new principles. Mutually advantageous cooperation is a two-way street. In its relations with Russia, Latvia is guided by an understanding that those relations should be the relations of two equal partners and therefore those relations should be built through dialogue, where possible, but maintaining the European Union's sanctions against Russia as long as it fails to fulfil the Minsk agreements.

A dialogue will be pursued on issues concerning practical cooperation between both countries. At the same time, Latvia will consistently adhere to the policy of non-recognition of the annexation of Crimea. Latvia will not recognise the Russian Federation passports issued in Crimea and Sevastopol, and will continue supporting restrictive measures imposed by the European Union on trade with Crimea and Sevastopol.

Transatlantic relations as the foundation for Euro-Atlantic security

At a time when Europe and the US are facing new challenges to their security, to their welfare and to their system of shared values, it is in Latvia's interests to promote transatlantic cooperation and unity.

In pursuit of that objective, Latvia is guided by the recognition that neither Europe nor the US has an alternative for transatlantic cooperation. This relationship should be developed in five main directions.

First, the European Union Member States and the European members of NATO should increase their defence budgets and better coordinate that expenditure.

Second, the defence capabilities of the NATO members located close to Russia should be enhanced by the presence of NATO Allies.

Third, Euro-Atlantic unity should be preserved on the issue of the application of the sanction regime, including against Russia over its aggression in Ukraine.

Fourth, cooperation and information sharing between the European Union Member States should be improved in combating international terrorism.

Fifth, there is an urgent need for strengthening cooperation between the European Union and the US to reduce hybrid threats.

Russia is reinforcing and expanding its military presence in the Baltic Sea region under the pretext that this is a response to NATO's decision to enhance the defence of its members – the Baltic States and Poland. Decisions on reinforcing collective defence are aimed at deterrence and they were made at the NATO Wales and Warsaw summits after Russia's aggression against Ukraine.

Transatlantic cooperation has been considerably strengthened by the deployment in Latvia of Canadian troops and those of other Allies. Importantly, this mission is carried out by the Allies from both North America and Europe, making this a unique mission for the defence of the Alliance's territory.

As a NATO member, Latvia actively advocates the Alliance's open-door policy. Any European country which is able to meet the obligations and commitments of NATO membership may join NATO. Montenegro joined the Alliance this year thereby increasing security in the Balkans region and in the Euro-Atlantic space as a whole.

The US military presence in the Baltic Sea region, as well as its considerable additional funding for strengthening Europe's defence in 2018, provides a clear political signal from President

Donald Trump concerning security, including energy security, of the Baltic States and Central Europe, and cooperation on cyber security. The current active political dialogue between Washington and Riga is indicative of the depth and strategic character of our relationship. For its part, Latvia honours the obligations of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation by contributing the necessary funding towards the development of its national defence capabilities and taking part in the fight against terrorism in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Hybrid threat and the resilience of society

Under the leadership of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the coordination of the fight against hybrid threats at the national level has been improved. Latvia has improved her strategic communication capabilities and she has one of the most effective cyber security systems, which is being upgraded on an ongoing basis. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, through developing cooperation in NATO, the EU and the NB8, will continue to actively work towards strengthening stability and reducing hybrid threats.

The development of opportunities offered by digital technologies, cyberspace, automation, and artificial intelligence technologies increasingly influences our contemporary society. The only way for Latvia to benefit from this development is to embrace it and be open to change. However, new technologies and the environment they are used in should be safe for the user. Therefore, it is vital that cyberspace be globally regulated in a manner that ensures the safety of its users as well as their rights, including freedom of speech. International cooperation should be continued to promote the development of an open, free, secure and safe cyberspace. Current mechanisms of international law that determine behaviour in other areas of life can also be applied in the digital environment. Latvia will support the further improvement of the international legal framework on cyberspace.

Latvia is interested in promoting cooperation between the European Union and NATO in reducing hybrid threats, including in the Baltic Sea region. The initiative by NATO and the European Union to establish in Helsinki a European Centre of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats is an important and timely step. Latvia actively participates in a work of the centre and supports its further development. The centre's activities will enhance the protection of the European Union Member States against hybrid threats, help raise national awareness of the elements of that threat and make it possible to devise joint lines of action for the European Union and NATO to counter them.

Propaganda spread by third countries threatens the European Union's cooperation with the Eastern Partnership and Central Asian countries. Therefore, it is a priority for Latvia to reinforce instruments that help reduce the impact of propaganda both in the European Union and internationally. They include: the promotion of critical thinking in society at large concerning the use of the media; raising the quality of journalism; exposing the propaganda falsehoods at the European Union level; and improve strategic communication.

Threats in cyberspace are becoming especially relevant these days. People's personal safety and the future of Latvian economy depend greatly on data security and the security of Latvia's data transfer networks, as well as on the capacity of the state and people to use modern technologies.

Set as a political priority, and the result of the competent work done by the Information Technology Security Incident Response Institution of Latvia, CERT.LV, an effective cybersecurity system has been established in Latvia. However, national efforts are not enough, as improving cybersecurity calls for active and targeted international cooperation. This is being pursued both in the European Union framework, and between the Baltic States in the Baltic-Nordic format. Cooperation is rapidly gaining ground between the European Union and the US in cybersecurity, a unique element of win-win transatlantic cooperation.

Latvia's security is currently ensured at a qualitatively much higher level than ever before in its century-long history. At the same time, challenges to Latvia's security and interests do exist. They include the aggressive foreign policy course of the Russia Federation, instability of the international system, international terrorism, the presence of which is also seen in the Baltic Sea region, and the threat of proliferation and use of weapons of mass destruction.

Competitive national economy

The mission of the Foreign Service, in active cooperation with line ministries and business associations, is, first, to assist Latvian companies with finding export opportunities in non-traditional markets and, second, to help attract investments that increase productivity, boost the development of a knowledge economy and increase the capacity for innovation.

One of the key tasks for Latvia is the promotion of its exports and businesses in the US and Canada and by attracting investments from those countries to Latvia's economy.

Opportunities offered by data transfer technologies, people's knowledge and skills enable countries to underpin the growth of their national economies by principles fundamentally different from the previous ones. The scale and advantages of the European Single Market as well as entering new markets allow Latvian companies to increase their competitiveness and reduce dependence on politically manipulated markets.

Role of the Nordic- Baltic region in Latvia's economy

The Nordic-Baltic (NB) market is the most vital market for the economic growth of Latvia. Latvia's total exports and imports to and from other Baltic States and Nordic countries exceed Latvia's trade with any other region or country. Around 45 per cent of goods exported by Latvian companies are destined for the Baltic States and Nordic countries, and the volumes are increasing.

In addition to trade, the NB countries have a closely integrated financial sector. Approximately 40 per cent of foreign direct investment into Latvia has originated in the Nordic countries and the other two Baltic States.

The Baltic States and Nordic countries have established a single electricity market. In addition, the opening of the natural gas market in Latvia and the development of new EU-based natural gas infrastructure projects in the Baltic States and Finland is expected to strengthen economic growth and energy security in the region. The Nordic-Baltic region is among the European Union's leading regions in innovation and the data economy. Recognizing this, deepening the

region's economic integration is the key precondition for the long-term growth of Latvia's national economy.

In 2018, Latvia will assume the Presidency of the Council of the Baltic Sea States. It is important for Latvia that the organisation implements tangible projects much needed by countries in the Baltic Sea region, thereby strengthening the region's sustainability, security and identity. The priorities of the Latvian Presidency will be the prevention of human trafficking, the combating of organised crime, the shaping and preservation of cultural heritage in the Baltic Sea region; also, Latvia will actively contribute to the formulation of the vision and strategy for the development of the Baltic Sea region.

New markets for Latvian businesses

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs supports business cooperation with the People's Republic of China, Japan, India, the Republic of Korea, the Gulf States, Africa, and Southeast Asia.

Activity of Latvian food producers in the Chinese market has considerably increased. Thirteen Latvian dairy companies and 33 fisheries companies have been certified for the export of their products to the Chinese market. Due to joint efforts of the Foreign Service and the Food and Veterinary Service, the process of certification of Latvian honey products in China has entered its final phase.

Tourism is one of the focal sectors of Latvia's cooperation with China. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs is working to increase the number of Chinese tourists visiting Latvia, for instance, by simplifying visa procedures. The number of Chinese tourists in Latvia in 2016 increased by approximately 60 per cent.

Latvia has been very successful in attracting foreign students to its higher education institutions, the greatest success being with students from India. India is currently a global epicentre of technology development and will remain one in the future. It is in Latvia's interests to strengthen this field of cooperation. Latvia will also actively do so in the future by arranging seminars to present Latvia's higher education opportunities and by supporting cooperation agreements signed between higher education institutions of both countries.

In support of information technology companies, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has informed Latvian IT companies on business opportunities in e-governance in two Latin American countries, Chile and Costa Rica. For this purpose, a market study was conducted and its findings were presented to Latvian companies, in cooperation with the European Union - Latin America and Caribbean Foundation and *ELAN Biz* programme aimed at promoting economic cooperation between the European Union and the Latin American countries and funded by the European Union.

Cooperation between China and Central and Eastern European countries in the '16+1' format is unfolding effectively. This cooperation, fully respecting Latvia's EU membership commitments, opens a direct opportunity for Latvia's political and economic dialogue with China. Concurrently, this format provides an excellent platform for businesses to meet each other. Latvia is interested in developing a transit cargo flow to and from China, as well as promoting mutually advantageous trade with China. Latvia's business cooperation with China is developing

successfully. Exports from Latvia has considerably increased. Although Latvia still has an external trade deficit with China, its proportions have notably changed in favour of Latvia's exports in recent years.

Latvia's OECD membership

The prosperity of Latvia is based on education, knowledge and the practical skills of its people. The mission of the Foreign Service is to ensure an international environment conducive to Latvia's economic development and to help Latvia adopt external best practices in economic policy.

Latvia's membership in the OECD should be viewed in this context. At this point, Latvia is already making use of this opportunity to evaluate and compare its policies with the best practices in the most advanced economies worldwide. Latvia's priorities lie in using OECD expertise to improve the quality of health care and education in Latvia, reduce corruption, improve tax compliance, and strengthening development cooperation. Following OECD guidelines, a state-owned enterprise governance reform was undertaken. Latvia's accession to the OECD Global Standard improves the capacity of State Revenue Service to curb the hiding of proceeds of shadow economy. This also reduces the role of bank secrecy in Latvia. In the field of consumer protection, a new procedure has been introduced for the out-of-court settlement of individual consumer disputes, Competition Assessment Guidelines for public administration institutions have been established.

Development cooperation being an important foreign policy instrument, Latvia intends in the future to join the OECD Development Assistance Committee, since its membership will allow Latvia more efficiently use development cooperation as a tool of international cooperation.

The European Union's trade agreements with third countries

International trade, free movement of goods, services and workers in the European Union's Single Market and the ability of the European Union to advance the opportunities of its Member States in global trade have facilitated and will further facilitate the welfare of Latvia. Latvian companies are intent on engaging in global food production chains. This opens new avenues for exports and transportation. It is important, therefore, to support those companies by advancing new generation trade agreements with third countries, while sustaining the employment standards at the present level. These agreements include an opportunity for ensuring the highest level of liberalisation of trade in goods and services and of investments, access to public procurement and effective protection of intellectual property.

Companies are already reaping benefits from 25 European Union's trade agreements with third countries currently in force, including with Canada, the Republic of Korea, Georgia, Ukraine and others. Negotiations have been completed on trade agreements between the European Union and Vietnam, Singapore, and Japan. Latvia supports the European Union's goal of expanding that list by adding new important free trade agreements, including with countries of the Mercosur bloc, Mexico, Australia, and New Zealand.

Regardless of the shift in the US policy in the field of multilateral trade, the European Union and the US should return, in a foreseeable future, to the signing of their free trade and investment agreement. This is one of Latvia's foreign trade priorities both in the European Union and in contacts with the US, and an agreement like this would deepen the strategic depth of relations between the European Union and the US.

It is apparent in the context of the multilateral trading system that countries still find it difficult to agree on vital solutions to issues, as is evidenced by the outcomes of the Eleventh Ministerial Conference of the World Trade Organisation (WTO). Nevertheless, the WTO still retains the central role in the multilateral trading system and will continue to actively facilitate global trade. Latvia's WTO membership is important as it ensures favourable and predictable trade conditions for the countries with which Latvia, being a European Union Member State, has no bilateral trade agreements. This will also make it possible to resolve major trade disputes (for instance, between the European Union and Russia) and, during the accession process of candidate countries, to address market access issues vital for Latvian businesses (for instance, in negotiations with Azerbaijan).

Diaspora policy: Latvians abroad

Under the present-day conditions when a considerable part of Latvian nationals live outside Latvia, there is an increasing need for the Latvian state to focus its attention on them encouraging the diaspora to be more active politically and to take an interest in Latvia. In total, the diaspora, consisting of those who emigrated before and during World War II and their descendants, as well as those who left Latvia after the Cold War and their descendants, has a great potential for supporting Latvian priorities. The Latvian state is interested in maintaining a link with its dispersed diaspora.

To this end, the diaspora policy is organised along four main priorities: encouraging Latvians living abroad towards political and civic participation in processes in Latvia; maintaining a link with Latvia and Latvian identity; strengthening cooperation with the diaspora in business, science, education, and culture; and promoting the idea of an economic community.

Latvia's interest lies in using the intellectual resources and experience of members of the diaspora for the benefit of the country by involving them in economic and political activities and formulating common long-term goals for cooperation with the diaspora. An important element in maintaining the link with Latvia is the provision of consular services to Latvians living abroad. Our diaspora is part of our nation, and its interests should both be heard and have democratic representation in policy making. Besides, as was the case with the Brexit negotiations, the state should support the rights of its diaspora.

Of particular note is the self-organization capacity of the diaspora, which is a complicated and voluntary endeavour by thousands of Latvian nationals as they contribute to the Latvian state. The World Federation of Free Latvians (WFFL) has played a decisive role in the field of economics and innovations: the organisation initiated and held the World Latvian Economics and Innovation Forum, including a special youth forum, to attract businessmen of Latvian descent to encourage Latvian businessmen residing abroad to do business in Latvia. Due to WFFL efforts, the Latvian Chamber of Commerce and Industry in cooperation with the Latvian government and

partner organisations is also engaging in this world scale networking. The forum is evolving into a tradition: forums have also taken place in London and in Chicago, with participation of the Investment and Development Agency of Latvia, Latvian embassies and honorary consuls, as well as regional diaspora organisations – the American Latvian Association in the United States (ALA) and the European Latvian Association (ELA).

The tradition of song festivals has been continued on three continents – Europe, North America and Australia – thereby enhancing Latvian self-organisation capacity, fostering Latvian national identity and strengthening cultural cooperation. Programmes run by the Ministry of Culture sponsor not only those events but also the participation of the diaspora’s cultural groups in the Centenary Song Festival, thereby upholding the continuity of the tradition. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs both supports the continuation of the programmes and will maintain, as much as possible, its support for activities that have proved instrumental for preserving Latvian identity.

As concerns access to education for children of Latvian heritage, there are more than 100 Latvian schools worldwide, and their establishment is mainly possible due to the initiative of people who recently emigrated and their capacity of self-organisation. More than a half of those schools are in European countries, the main destination of recent emigration.

In facilitating the return of nationals who have emigrated, this process will only be successful if the state and local authorities are able to provide the returnees with housing, schools and kindergartens. Therefore, the process of remigration depends to a great extent on effective and targeted cooperation between the Ministry of Education and Science, the Ministry of Economics and local authorities.

In the age of increasing mobility, when people establish their residence outside the borders of their country, the state of Latvia is interested in building a clear and predictable long-term relationship with its diaspora. This can best be accomplished by drafting and adopting a special Latvian diaspora law that would set out the objectives and tasks of this cooperation as well as the rights and obligations of the parties. Being conducive to sustainability of those relations, this will be a step forward for both the Latvian diaspora and the Latvian state. The drafting and adoption of the diaspora law is scheduled for 2018.

The numerical strength of the diaspora communities in various regions of the world is changing under the impact of globalisation, posing new challenges to the work of the Foreign Service. All those aspects will be considered in drawing up the new diaspora policy planning document for the period of 2019–2020, which is expected to put the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in charge of inter-institutional coordination of this work in Latvia to fulfil the objectives, tasks and projects contained in the document.

Conclusion

Latvia stands for a strong, united and free Europe, this being a vital element of the existing international order. Europe is not only a part of the Western world but also the upholder of values and norms that help maintain peace and foster wellbeing worldwide. Latvia underlines the role of NATO both in the area of national security and in strengthening international security in Europe and globally. Latvia sees itself as an active participant in the processes of integration with the European Union and a reliable partner in transatlantic security.

In this context, Latvia's foreign policy priorities are focused on the strengthening of national interests of Latvia – on the security and well-being of its people – in the extremely dynamic international environment. Responding to global challenges, Latvia, in its foreign policy, will preserve unchanged what serves her national interests.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs is not alone in defining the goals of and implementing its foreign policy: Latvia's foreign policy is formulated in close cooperation between the Parliament, the President, the Cabinet, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and civil society. These cooperation mechanisms are of such a scale that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs cannot replace individual line ministries; however, in pursuit of its national foreign policy, it can actively contribute and help achieve goals set by the various line ministries.

Communication with the general public about European and foreign affairs, topics against the background of challenges named earlier in this report is more important than ever; such communication is an integral part of the development of Latvia's foreign policy. A distinctive feature of contemporary international relations involves an increasing involvement of non-governmental organisations, which influences both the character of international relations and the way policies are implemented.

The understanding, support and involvement of the general public in Latvia's foreign policy are of vital importance. Dialogue on foreign policy with the civil society of Latvia, including Latvian youth organisations – representatives of the generation which, in the future, will live in the country we are building today – is not only an opportunity but also a necessity. Latvia's non-governmental organisations have access to broad international contacts and expertise useful for Latvia. This expertise and knowledge also serve Latvia's interests in its key partner countries. The point of view on different foreign policy topics offered by non-governmental organisations active in foreign affairs is an important tool of shaping public opinion.

New opportunities for performing concrete foreign policy tasks are identified through dialogue drawing on the capabilities, expertise and experience of non-governmental organisations in the most varied realms of public life and international relations. Only in this way can we ensure that Latvia's foreign policy keeps pace with the times and the interests of the Latvian people.

Minister of Foreign Affairs

Edgars Rinkēvičs