

The International Organisation of La Francophonie (IOF)

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The International Organisation of La Francophonie (IOF) represents 80 member states and governments which use the French language on a daily basis or want to strengthen its presence and which have committed to cooperate with the aim of promoting democracy and humanist values across the globe. The IOF currently includes 54 members, 3 associate members and 23 observers. Latvia joined the IOF as an observer on 19 October 2008.

History: On 20 March 1970, the IOF was established in Niger as an intergovernmental organisation of French-speaking nations called the Agency of Cultural and Technical Cooperation. At the time, the principal aim of the new organisation was to assist francophone countries in the wake of decolonisation. However, its mission grew broader with time. Since the early 1990s, the organisation was also open to the Central and Eastern European countries. In 1998, to emphasise that it was an organisation of governments, it became the Intergovernmental Agency of Francophonie. And when a new Charter of Francophony was eventually adopted in 2005, the organisation was renamed “the International Organisation of La Francophonie” (IOF) as it is still known today.

Geographically the IOF spans Europe, West Africa, Central Africa, the Indian Ocean region, North Africa and the Middle East, America and the Caribbean, and Asia and South Pacific. 31 of the IOF's member states and governments are located in Europe. Together, the members of the IOF represent over one-third of the United Nations' member states with a population of over 890 million people, including 220 million French speakers.

Missions: The IOF has defined four missions for its activity: a) promoting the French language, the cultural and linguistic diversity; b) strengthening democracy, prevention and settlement of conflicts, and support for human rights; c) support for education and training; d) promoting economic growth of the Francophone countries through solidarity and practical multilateral cooperation oriented toward sustainable development.

The Francophonie devotes particular attention to young people and women, as well as accessibility of information and communication technologies.

The ten-year plan: Every ten years, the Francophone countries agree on priority areas for their mutual cooperation. The 15th Summit of the Heads of State and Government of the Francophonie in Dakar in November 2014 adopted the Strategic Framework of the Francophonie for 2015–2022 laying down the following objectives:

- increase the influence and use of the French language internationally;

- strengthen the role and place of the Francophonie on the international stage to improve multilateralism and governance worldwide;

- empower women and youth as agents of peace and development;

- support innovation and creativity to promote economic growth and sustainable development.

As part of the ten-year plan, a number of programmes are being developed for member states to apply for funding to their projects, contribute to the financing of those programmes, request support on political issues, etc. Member states also cooperate and consult with each other on various matters within other international organisations.

Institutional structure: The IOF consists of both political and administrative bodies, the highest-ranking of those being (1) the *Summit of the Heads of State and Government of the Francophonie* which convenes every two years. The agendas of the summits are prepared by (2) the *Ministerial Conferences* and (3) the *Permanent Council*. The Summit and the Ministerial Conference oversee the work of (4) the International Organisation of the Francophonie (and Secretary General), which implement practical international cooperation and follow up on the decisions of political bodies. (5) The *Parliamentary Assembly of the Francophonie* plays advisory role acting in the interests of French-speaking communities to promote democracy, the rule of law, and human rights. Latvia joined the Parliamentary Assembly before becoming a participant of the IOF.

In January 2015, Michaëlle Jean, a former Governor General of Canada, was elected Secretary General of the IOF. She is the first woman to occupy this post.

The next Summit of the Heads of State and Government of the Francophonie has been scheduled for autumn 2016 in Madagascar.

Further information about the International Organisation of La Francophonie: www.francophonie.org

LATVIA AND "LA FRANCOFONIE"

In 2006, the Saeima (the Latvian Parliament) joined the IOF Parliamentary Assembly as an observer. At the same time, Latvia submitted its application for membership of the organisation during the Francophone Summit in Bucharest, in which the then President of Latvia, Vaira Vīķe Freiberga, also took part. *Latvia* was accepted as an *observer* to the IOF at the *12th Summit of the Francophone Countries* in Quebec, Canada, on 17-19 October 2008. Since 14 October 2010, Latvia has been represented in the OIF by the Personal Representative of the President of Latvia, Latvian Ambassador to France, Sanita Pavļuta-Deslandes.

On 13 September 2013, the University of Latvia joined the Agency of Francophone Universities (*Agence universitaire de la Francophonie*) as an associated member. The network of francophone universities has 812 members in 104 countries, 60 of which are the OIF members. Several institutions of higher education in Latvia have signed bilateral cooperation agreements with universities in the OIF countries.

Latvia and countries of La Francophonie cooperate both in multilateral and bilateral format. The most vivid example of practical multilateral cooperation between Latvia and La Francophonie is Latvia's participation in the OIF "French Language in International Relations" programme devised for the French language studies by people employed in public administration. Under the programme, on a yearly basis, 300 Latvian civil servants working with EU-related matters and multilateral issues acquire both the basic knowledge and specialised use of French. From 2008 to the end of 2014, the training was financed by the IOF, France, the French-speaking community of Belgium, and Luxembourg within the framework of the Memorandum of Cooperation for the implementation of the long-term programme of teaching the French language to the public administration of Latvia.

With the aim of reinforcing cooperation, during the *31st Ministerial Conference of La Francophonie* in *Yerevan* on 10 October 2015, the IOF and 11 countries including Latvia signed a Memorandum of Cooperation on the National Francophone Initiative for 2015-2018 within the framework of the "French in International Relations" Programme.

The Ambassadors of Latvia and IOF countries also cooperate in other international organisations, especially in terms of consulting on issues of special interest for a country. Some international organisations hold regular meetings of IOF Ambassadors. The IOF has signed cooperation agreements with a number of international and regional organisations (for example, the UN, the European Union, the African Union). The IOF has its permanent representations in international organisations such as the UN in New York and Geneva, the European Union and the African Union.

Latvia enjoys active bilateral with many OIF member states. The contribution of the OIF member states such as France, Belgium, Switzerland, and Canada, which have resident diplomatic missions in Latvia – to the development of the French-speaking environment and francophone cooperation is noteworthy. Latvia has been actively engaged in organising the Days of La Francophonie to mark the 20th of March – the date when in 1970 an agreement was signed that brought the organisation into existence (the establishment of the Agency for Cultural and Technical Cooperation). The Embassies of Austria, the Czech Republic, Greece, Moldova and Hungary also take part in drawing up a programme of events dedicated to the International Francophonie Day.

Further information:

The Embassy of France in Latvia: www.ambafrance-lv.org

The French Institute in Latvia – *L'Institut français de Lettonie* (language studies, information on scholarships and study

opportunities in France): <http://www.institut-francais.lv>

Jules Verne Riga French School – *Ecole Française Jules Verne de Riga*(included in the network of the Agency for French Education Abroad (AEFE)): <http://www.ecolejulesverne.lv>

Non-resident Embassy of Belgium to Latvia (in Stockholm): <http://diplomatie.belgium.be/latvia/>

The Delegation of Wallonie-Bruxelles to Poland and the Baltic States (based in Warsaw): <http://www.wbi.be/fr/delegations/delegation/delegation-wallonie-bruxelles-varsovie#.VQf3TEYcSUK>

Economic and Commercial Representation of Wallonia and the French-speaking community of Brussels in the Baltic States – AWEX: <http://www.belgium.apollo.lv>

The Embassy of Switzerland in Latvia: <http://www.eda.admin.ch/riga>

The Embassy of Canada in Latvia: <http://www.latvija.gc.ca>

<https://www.mfa.gov.lv/en/international-organisation-la-francophonie-iof>