Ministry structure

The operation of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is carried out by seven directorates, divided into departments and divisions. There are three political directorates (the EU Directorate, the Security Policy Directorate, and the Bilateral Relations Directorate), as well as the Economic Relations and Development Co-operation Directorate, the Legal and Consular Affairs Directorate, the Administrative Directorate, and the Personnel Policy Development Directorate. The Ministry structure is adaptable and is constantly being upgraded.

The Secretary of State is also in charge of the State Protocol, which ensures that the operations of the State President, the Prime Minister, and the Minister for Foreign Affairs are in keeping with the norms and traditions of diplomatic protocol. The State Protocol also deals with issues of diplomatic privileges and immunities.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has a supervisory role over the Latvian Institute, which is a state agency.

Diplomatic representations

Latvia maintains diplomatic relations with 153 states of the world. At present, Latvia has 35 embassies, two consulates, 2 consulates-general, and nine permanent missions to international organisations. Latvia also has 122 honorary consuls and nine honorary consuls-general.

The Latvian diplomatic and consular service protects the interests of its nationals abroad and exercises consular functions. The staff of embassies, consulates, and missions inform the foreign community and official institutions about Latvia, co-ordinate international contacts with Latvian state institutions, and regularly report to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on developments in the respective state.

Personnel and budget

As of the beginning of 2008, the Latvian foreign service employed 720 people, including 316 persons working in diplomatic representations abroad. The personnel is highly qualified - 91% have tertiary education. 64% of the staff of the foreign service are female.

The Ministry budget for 2008 is almost 41 million lats. A significant portion of the budget is spent on the upkeep of the Ministry and diplomatic representations abroad. Payments to international organisations and funding for the Latvian Institute, as well as development co-operation projects and international aid are also provided from the budget of the Ministry.
The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia is the highest institution of state administration which develops and implements Latvia’s foreign policy in order to ensure a stable and regional environment conducive to the healthy development of the society of Latvia in conditions of rapidly changing international politics, globalisation, and climate change.

One of the cornerstones of Latvian foreign policy since 2004 has been an active participation of the state in the European Union (EU) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO).

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, working together with the Saeima and the State President, and by use of political and diplomatic means, fulfils the following functions:
- develops and implements a unified foreign policy of the state,
- carries out the functions of the State Protocol,
- exercises consular functions in Latvia and abroad,
- prepares and issues licences for the import, export, and transit of goods of significant economic importance,
- performs other functions prescribed in external regulatory enactments.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia was established in July 1919 on the basis of existing international practice and observing the specific conditions of Latvia. Zigfrīds Anna Meierovics (1887-1925) became the first Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia. He was also the first diplomatic representative of Latvia to work abroad and the founder of the Latvian diplomatic service.

The Latvian diplomatic service is the only institution of the Republic of Latvia that has been in continuous operation since the establishment of the state in 1918 up until now. On a limited scale, it continued to safeguard the interests of the state of Latvia also during the years of occupation (1940-1990). Owing to the contacts established, the expertise developed, and the funds accumulated by the Latvian diplomatic service and Latvian organization representatives abroad, in 1990, after the restoration of Latvia’s independence, doors to the world were opened for a new generation of Latvian diplomats.

In its operation the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia has defined the following goals:

**Latvia in an international environment**

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs supports the adoption of international decisions which promote the security and welfare of Latvia, as well as the advancement of the EU and the Baltic Sea Region. The Ministry actively pursues the protection of Latvia’s interests at the United Nations (UN) and in other international organisations, maintaining bilateral relations with other states and developing regional cooperation.

**International security**

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs promotes the prevention of international conflicts and crises through working together with its partners in NATO, the EU, and in other international and regional organisations. In association with the Ministry of Defence and other partner institutions, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs works towards averting possible threats, seeking to reduce the spread of terrorism and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction in the world.

**Justice, rule of law, and democracy**

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs is engaged in fostering the advance of democracy, equality, rule of law, good governance, and adherence to human rights internationally. With Latvia’s experience of the development of the state, the Ministry extends its assistance to neighbouring countries of the EU, promoting sustainable growth and an effective market economy.

**Improved economic competitiveness and welfare of Latvia**

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in co-operation with other state institutions, the private sector, and NGOs, encourages the establishment of open terms on the global market, which would be based on legal grounds. Through the network of Latvia’s representations, the Ministry takes part in the promotion of export, the attraction of foreign investment for the growth of the local economy, and also protects the interests of Latvian business people abroad.

The promotion of Latvia’s image abroad

Together with the Latvian Institute and diplomatic representations, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs provides information about Latvia to other states, about its history, achievements in politics, economy, culture, and other fields in order to raise the profile of Latvia internationally.

**An open, service-oriented Ministry of Foreign Affairs**

The Ministry works together actively with the community and the private sector, communicating with the public, improving transparency and fostering modern partnerships. The Ministry develops the network of Latvia’s diplomatic representations and provides speedy, efficient, and competent assistance to Latvian nationals abroad. The Ministry encourages the relaxation of visa requirements and facilitates opportunities for Latvians doing business abroad.

**Ministry administration**

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs is headed by the Minister for Foreign Affairs and the Secretary of State.

**The Minister for Foreign Affairs** is a member of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Latvia and is responsible for the operation of the Latvian foreign service at the political level. Since 8 November 2007, Māris Riekstīns is the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia.

**The Secretary of State** is the highest-ranking civil servant, who fulfils duties as the administrative head of the Ministry. Since 25 November 2004, Normans Penke is the Secretary of State of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The Under-Secretaries of State assist the Minister and the Secretary of State in their work. Each is responsible for a specific area and administers a certain directorate.