



Ministry of  
Foreign Affairs  
Republic of Latvia



# Annual Report of the Foreign Minister

on the accomplishments and further work with respect to  
national foreign policy and the European Union

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# Summary



The intensity of conflicts of varying magnitude are on the rise in the world, undermining the global order underpinned by the United Nations Charter, international law and the rule of law. Ukraine, by thwarting the Russian invasion, continues to reclaim occupied territories as well as taking meaningful steps towards its membership in the European Union (EU) and NATO. In the matters of strategic stability and arms control, the erosion of control mechanisms is intensifying. Hybrid attacks are a destabilising factor that continues to evolve. The global economy is still facing uncertainty overall, its growth prospects are unclear. There is a polarisation of public opinion and a division of political power in European countries and elsewhere, which complicate decision-making. China, on the other hand, continues to advance its initiatives in international organizations aimed at transforming the existing rules-based international order in line with its own interests. At the same time, Latvia is under no direct military threat, NATO is stronger and more united than ever, while the EU has taken strategic decisions in defence, economic security, enlargement, and other areas. And, in addition, we are witnessing a significant increase in public interest and involvement in security and foreign policy issues.

Russia's aggression against Ukraine is the greatest long-term threat to security and the international order based on UN Charter provisions. Ukraine's victory will be pivotal for what the international environment will look like and what principles it will be based on in the future. Russia's attempts to change national borders through military force are an example of efforts to destroy legitimate authority and replace it with a diktat of power. Ukraine's fierce resistance against the aggressor, with the help of its reliable allies, has halted the military expansion of Russia and disrupted its plans to destroy the Ukrainian state and nation, and maintained Allied unity and support for Ukraine's integration into the EU and NATO.

Despite serious losses, Russia continues its aggression against Ukraine while rebuilding its military capabilities. The international community therefore needs to increase all support to Ukraine and weaken Russia's military potential, including through strong counter-measures for countries, companies and individuals that support Russia in its aggression.

In the Middle East, an attack by the Hamas terrorist group on Israel has resulted in large numbers of casualties, creating tensions and escalating disagreements across the region and that includes the risk of escalation into a high-intensity regional conflict with global repercussions. Iran's support for armed groups and destabilizing forces contributes to the further deterioration of the situation. Political instability and escalation of violence can be seen in the Sahel region of Africa, where Russia's Wagner Group mercenaries have had a significant influence. In Afghanistan, the Taliban, a potential source of destabilization in the region, retain power. Tensions also persist in Asia, where North Korea's missile testing goes hand-in-hand with aggressive, anti-Western rhetoric. The development of China's military capabilities and an increase in its activities in the region, especially in the South China Sea, as well as the Taiwan Strait, are also cause for concern.

With Russia having either withdrawn from important arms control agreements, or failing to adhere to them, the arms control system is unravelling. Regional and international security is undermined by North Korea's nuclear arms drive, and by Iran's efforts in this same area and by the way those countries have been veering away from their commitments under international arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation mechanisms. China was further expanding its nuclear capabilities while simultaneously demonstrating a reserved attitude towards involvement in strategic arms control mechanisms.

Hybrid attacks of various forms are increasing in intensity. The pressure of illegal migration instigated and orchestrated by Russia and Belarus directed toward NATO's eastern border from Finland to Poland is on the rise; it is being, and will be successfully deterred. The cyberattacks and information manipulation operations prepared and implemented by forces from abroad are persistent. Critical infrastructure in the Baltic Sea region is under threat.

The growth prospects of the global economy remain unclear. Growth is impacted by geopolitical tensions caused by conflicts and their economic consequences – high inflation, falling production, decreasing exports, refocusing trade flows, access to energy resources and raw materials, unfair competition from specific countries, and non-compliance with international rules.

**In the face of increasing international instability, ensuring SECURITY has come to the fore as a key task in achieving the overarching goal of Latvia's foreign policy – preserving independence, sustainable security and public welfare of a democratic state.** Latvia therefore deepens cooperation with the EU and NATO Allies and partners by developing and expanding bilateral relations, advocating for harnessing of the potential of multilateral diplomacy and international organisations, actively participating in the regional formats of like-minded countries, emphasising in particular the importance of cooperation between the Baltic States, and the Nordic-Baltic (NB8) cooperation for the development of a common viewpoints. Latvia's approach has been unwaveringly based on respect for the principles of democracy, protection of human rights, and principles of international law. The foreign policy of Latvia represents a common approach implemented in close cooperation among the President, the Saeima, the Prime Minister, line ministries, municipalities, social partners, and members of civil society. **Latvia upholds continuity in pursuit of its foreign policy.**

**In the context of heightened international tensions, Latvia has invested considerable effort preserving independence, sustainable security and public welfare into reinforcing internal and external security, a major role in which is played by the implementation of a common foreign policy.** Latvia is under no direct military threat; internal stability and conditions for promoting economic growth and the welfare of the population are ensured. Significant investments have been made to strengthen national security, the defence budget has reached 2.4% of gross domestic product (GDP), the national defence service has been successfully launched, the number of personnel of the armed forces has been increased, and their capabilities have been improved. New defence systems (air defence, coastal defence and rocket artillery) are being acquired and new military infrastructure is being constructed. The military presence of NATO Allies in terms of both soldiers and military equipment has significantly increased. Finland's accession to NATO and Sweden's imminent accession strengthen the security of the Baltic Sea region and the entire Euro-Atlantic space.

**Latvia continued providing comprehensive support to Ukraine in its fight against the Russian aggression.** Latvia's assistance to Ukraine has reached 0.85% of GDP, strong support has been expressed for Ukraine's integration with the EU and NATO. Latvia has promoted further

international isolation of Russia and has argued for Russia to be held accountable for crimes of aggression and for war crimes.

Latvia has exerted great efforts to strengthen the rules-based international order. As part of its Presidency of the **Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe**, Latvia has ensured the establishment of the Register of Damage Caused by the Aggression of the Russian Federation Against Ukraine, which is the first step towards the creation of an international compensation mechanism. **While coordinating cooperation in the NB8 format**, Latvia prioritised formulation of a common position of the region in support of Ukraine, which manifested in joint statements before the United Nations, in organising visits to demonstrate backing for Ukraine, and in enhanced consultations between our respective foreign services. **Latvia has moved ahead with its campaign to win an elected seat on the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) for the 2026–2027 term**, focusing on intensifying contacts with partners across the globe in order to inform them about its UNSC candidacy priorities, explain the consequences of the war caused by Russia, promote Latvia's international visibility, and explore opportunities to develop bilateral cooperation.

## **IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF ITS FOREIGN POLICY GOALS IN 2024, LATVIA WILL CONCENTRATE ON THREE PILLARS:**

1. Strengthening of Latvia's security and a rules-based international order.
2. Strengthening economic growth and resilience, increasing the EU's global competitiveness and influence.
3. Protection of interests of Latvian nationals, involvement of the public in the formulation and implementation of foreign policy, unlocking the potential of the diaspora.

### **1. Strengthening Latvia's security and a rules-based international order**

#### **NATO**

- ❖ Closer cooperation with transatlantic Allies, notably, strengthening an enduring military presence in Latvia and preparing for the NATO Washington Summit.
- ❖ Increasing NATO's military presence and advancing towards the establishment of a brigade-level battle group, while continuing, in a targeted manner, to strengthen host nation support.
- ❖ Further development of cooperation within the framework of the Baltic States, the NB8, as well as NB8+ formats, prioritising issues related to strengthening security.

#### **SUPPORT FOR UKRAINE**

- ❖ Support is being given to Ukraine in the process of its Euro-Atlantic integration as well as the provision of bilateral military, financial and humanitarian assistance, and that offered by EU and other organisations, including support for reconstruction and reform processes through development cooperation instruments, participation in the EU's military mission helping to train Ukrainian soldiers, provision of contributions within the framework of the EU's European Peace Facility and the NATO Comprehensive Assistance Package for Ukraine.

- ❖ Providing support for the implementation of the Ukrainian-led Peace Initiative, further promotion of Russia's international isolation, holding Russia accountable for its crime of aggression and war crimes.
- ❖ Continuation of sanctions policies against Russia and Belarus and support for their imposition on other countries, companies and individuals to reduce Russia's ability to persist in its aggression.
- ❖ Prevention of the circumvention of sanctions imposed on Russia and Belarus thereby also reducing negative impact on Latvia's economy and competitiveness in various sectors.

### IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

- ❖ Enhancement of EU defence capabilities, with the development of the defence industry as a priority, including joint production projects by Member States with EU funding, joint procurement in the defence sector, and addressing security of raw material supply chains. It is vital to move towards greater interoperability in armaments.
- ❖ Further strengthening of military mobility.
- ❖ Following a sustainable EU enlargement policy by strengthening security and the rule of law on the European continent, as well as intensifying the EU's cooperation with its neighbouring regions, stimulating stability, security and development, and taking into account Russia's ongoing efforts to project its influence on them.
- ❖ In response to the instrumentalisation of migration geared towards destabilisation of the EU, EU-level solutions are needed to strengthen the capacity of EU Member States to address this hybrid threat.

### INTERNATIONALLY

- ❖ Taking into account international tensions and the need to both listen to global partners and explain Latvia's position, consultations and contacts will be extended with global partners in Asia, Africa and Latin America. The main focus will be placed on informing them about Latvia's priorities in the UN, explaining the negative impact of the Russian aggression against Ukraine, and strengthening the bilateral cooperation component, especially in economic and trade relations.
- ❖ Goal-oriented lobbying of Latvia's candidacy for an elected seat on the UNSC for the period of 2026–2027.
- ❖ Advancement among UN Member States of topics relevant to Latvia – Security Council reforms, cyber security, information space security, and implementation of the resolution on Women, Peace and Security.
- ❖ Further efforts expended on development co-operation in order to further increase funding and expanding the scope of target regions, carrying out projects, as well as the implementation of the Development Co-operation Policy Plan for 2024-2027.
- ❖ Continued participation in international military and civilian missions, thereby contributing to international security and stability.

## 2. Strengthening economic growth and resilience, increasing the EU's global competitiveness and influence

- ❖ Preparation of the EU Strategic Agenda for 2024–2029.
- ❖ Putting into practice the EU Economic Security Strategy, including diversification of supply chains.
- ❖ The EU's institutional and policy adjustment so that EU could function and develop successfully in view of its future enlargement.
- ❖ Promoting the conclusion of EU trade agreements with the Mercosur countries in 2024 as well as with Australia, Mexico, India, Indonesia, and Thailand.
- ❖ Intensifying cooperation with non-EU countries as well as permanent support to Latvian companies and industries in exploring and entering new export markets, including in the areas of high technology and the defence industry.
- ❖ Preparations for the World Trade Organisation (WTO) 13th Ministerial Conference in 2024 with a special focus on the development of trade rules in the areas of environment and climate, digitalisation, agriculture and food security, and attraction of investments.
- ❖ Participation in the development of standards in the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and their introduction nationally, notably in the areas of good governance, business, environment and climate, digitalisation, and social inclusion.

## 3. Protection of the interests of Latvian nationals, involvement of the public in the formulation and implementation of foreign policy, unlocking the potential of the diaspora

- ❖ Promoting interaction with the diaspora on the basis of a cooperation plan for 2024–2027 for as broad and effective as possible use of the international representation and capabilities of the Latvian community in Latvia's international interests and for its economic development.
- ❖ Maintaining a regular dialogue with the general public on latest developments in foreign policy.
- ❖ Further improvement of the provision of consular assistance by launching a new Consular Register aimed at providing more efficient and rapid assistance in crisis situations.
- ❖ Development of the accessibility of electronic services so that Latvians abroad could have broader opportunities for receiving services by Latvian public authorities in a quick and easy manner.

**Given the dynamics of international processes, the unpredictability and fragmentation of the international environment, as well as the efforts to marginalise the norms of international law, Latvia needs to continue strengthening its Foreign Service by creating conditions, as a matter of priority, to ensure the development of diplomats' qualifications and capacity building among the Foreign Service in line with the increasing pressures.** Full professional ability by the Foreign Service to respond to the current security situation in the world and contemporary challenges will be an equally important contribution to the security of the country as a whole and to the protection of the interests of Latvian nationals abroad. The

development of the embassy network will be continued in order to ensure a broad and at the same time rational representation of Latvia in the world.

## Latvia in a changing security environment



With Russia's aggression against Ukraine, the regional and global security environment has changed irreversibly. Latvia and NATO, as well as the EU, have successfully adapted to this situation. Latvia is investing in its security and, together with its allies, creating a deterrence and defence system that strengthens NATO's eastern flank and guarantees common security. To ensure sustainable security and stability, Latvia and its allies must continue to help Ukraine achieve victory in its fight against the aggressor, must strive to limit the aggressor's capabilities at this point and in the future, while at the same time considering the future principles of the international and European security architecture. Closer transatlantic cooperation plays a special role in strengthening Latvia's security. Latvia firmly and consistently stands up for the restoration of the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Ukraine within its internationally recognized borders, underlining that only Ukraine has the right to decide on the conditions under which the Russian aggression can be considered to have ended. Latvia provides comprehensive support to Ukraine and actively supports the policy of sanctions against Russia and Belarus. Overcoming the consequences of the war waged by Russia on Ukraine will be of a long-term nature, which will require Latvia to invest effort, resources and attention over time, as well as to maintain solidarity in providing support to Ukraine. Latvia strongly and consistently supports Ukraine's membership in NATO and Ukraine's integration into the EU.

The rules-based international order is experiencing a serious crisis, fuelled by Russia's gross violation of the UN Charter, China's insistence on proposing alternative initiatives for the future world order, the inability or unwillingness of individual countries to find a unified approach in resolving conflicts. Therefore, from Latvia's perspective, an important task is the restoration of the full functioning of international law, the improvement of the functioning and reliability of international organizations, the eradication of the spheres of influence approach and the policy-of-force diktat. From Latvia's perspective, there are no legitimate and credible alternatives to the UN system in the foreseeable future; therefore, it is important to strengthen the fundamental principles of the UN, reform the Security Council, end Russia's aggression, and hold the country accountable for the crime of aggression. In this regard, it is important intensify contacts with global partners. Latvia sees its contribution to the promotion of peace and stability by actively implementing development cooperation projects and participating in international missions. Latvia's candidacy and potential non-permanent membership of the UN Security Council for the period of 2026-2027 will be an important contribution by Latvia to the strengthening of the rules-based international order.

## Transatlantic relations

**From the early days of Russia's full-scale aggression against Ukraine, the central role of transatlantic cooperation has been even further ingrained in the foreign and security policy of Latvia and Europe. Latvia's relations with the USA and Canada are based on a common understanding of values, the rules-based international order and the role of multilateral cooperation in addressing global issues. Steadfast and spirited cooperation between the United States and Europe combined with cooperation with partners brought in from other regions of the world, is the main instrument for preserving the world order established after World War II. The safeguarding of this order is of existential importance for Latvia. The presence of transatlantic allies in the Baltic region is an indispensable element of deterrence and defence for the common security of both Latvia and Europe. Regular interstate dialogue is ongoing at various levels with the United States and Canada. The USA provides significant financial and practical support for the strengthening of Latvia's military capabilities, interoperability and infrastructure, while Canada is the framework nation of the NATO enhanced Forward Presence (eFP) battle group stationed in Latvia. Latvia supports more intensive cooperation between the EU and its transatlantic partners.**

In 2023, the President and the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Latvia visited the USA, while the United States Trade Representative, Katherine Tai, the Governor of Michigan, Gretchen Whitmer, and the United States Senator Steve Daines visited Latvia. In 2023, the presence of fully equipped US troops on permanent rotation continued in Latvia. The Baltic Security Initiative has been allocated USD 225 million under the US budget for 2023. With this programme, the United States supports the development of defence capabilities, interoperability, and military infrastructure projects in Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. USD 153 million was allocated by the United States to defence cooperation programmes for European allies affected by Russia's war in Ukraine. Each Baltic state was allocated USD 10 million under the Foreign Military Financing program. In addition, USD 160.7 million was allocated to Latvia in this program to strengthen security in its territory and on NATO's Eastern flank as a whole. In December 2023, an agreement was signed on the sale of six HIMARS missile artillery systems to Latvia. Under the US budget for 2024, funding in the amount of more than USD 200 million has been envisaged for Latvia. In addition to excellent cooperation on security and defence matters, the promotion of economic cooperation is under way, especially in the field of investment and high technology, including for the use of 5G in the defence sector for the development and application of new technologies and products, as well as cooperation towards education and community resilience.

Intensification of EU-US relations and resolution of problematic questions as soon as possible is in the interests of Latvia. The EU-US summit held in Washington in October 2023 reaffirmed that the EU-US partnership is predictable and sustainable, adopted a plan for further action, including long-term support for Ukraine, global and transatlantic security and defence, economic resilience, fighting climate change, and energy security, as well as trade and deepening of economic relations. Latvia's interests lie in having a common EU and US approach to the development of new technologies, their regulation, especially with regard to artificial intelligence (AI) and related issues. From the perspective of Latvia's interests, several important milestones should be noted in the agenda of the EU-US trade relations in 2023. Work on concluding agreements on steel and aluminium and on critical minerals has been actively in progress. These agreements will not only deepen mutual economic relations and promote the export capacity of the EU Member States businesses, but also promote Europe's resilience, including trade-related aspects such as the promotion of fair competition and compliance with market-oriented conditions. In Latvia's opinion, the EU-US Trade and Technology Council plays a major role in strengthening the positive agenda of transatlantic relations and trade. In 2023, the fourth and fifth high-level meetings were held, where joint support to Ukraine remained a constant priority, while continuing to pursue

close cooperation on export control and sanctions against Russia. Work went ahead on the Transatlantic Initiative on Sustainable Trade, methodology development for identifying and analysing foreign intervention operations, and on information exchange on non-market policies.

Latvia has continued contributing to the strengthening of democratic values by participating in the Summit for Democracy processes together with its strategic partners, the USA and Canada, especially in the field of information integrity and media freedom, where, together with Canada, Latvia co-leads the Information Integrity Cohort. In 2023, the President participated in the second Democracy Summit meeting.

In 2023, Latvia hosted a visit from the Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, the Defense Minister Anita Anand, the Senate Speaker George Ferry, and the National Defense Committee of the Canadian House of Commons. In 2024, there are plans to hold a meeting of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of Canada and the Baltic States in Riga. The Road Map between Canada and Latvia signed in 2023, which, among other topics, envisages an increase in the size of the battle group in Latvia. The battle group is an important guarantor of the security of Latvia and the region and a strong political pledge of Allied solidarity. It is vital that cooperation be continued with Canada not only in security and defence, but also in the field of information integrity and media freedom, and in implementing measures under the UN Women, Peace and Security agenda. It is important to continue developing economic cooperation, especially in the field of high technology, including for the use of 5G in the defence sector for the development and application of new technologies and products. Latvia also stands up for the closest possible cooperation in EU-Canada formats.

## Strengthening the capabilities of NATO and the EU

**Latvia's priorities at the Vilnius summit were the strengthening of NATO's deterrence and defence capabilities, as well as achieving a breakthrough in the Ukraine-NATO relations. The Vilnius decisions confirm the implementation of those priorities. The new regional defence plans were approved, an agreement was reached on 2% of GDP as the minimum investment threshold in Allied defence, specific decisions were made regarding the Alliance's anti-aircraft and anti-missile defence, as well as strengthening the capacity of the defence industry.**

**In 2023, practical measures continued on the expansion of the NATO battle group to the level of a brigade and the purchase of armament to improve combat capabilities. Latvia's investment in defence currently amounts to approximately 2.4% of GDP.** Since the largest military procurements in the history of Latvia are currently being planned to ensure the security of its airspace, sea borders, eastern borders, as well as cyberspace, Latvia's defence investments will reach 3% of its gross domestic product by 2027. Latvia is planning to procure IRIS-T, HIMARS and Naval Strike Missile rocket and artillery systems, as well as ATACMS long-range precision missile.

Several allies have provided Latvia with, or deployed their military equipment in Latvia. Canada plans to deploy approximately 2,200 fully equipped Canadian troops to enhance the NATO presence in Latvia. As the host country, Latvia has launched construction of the Selonia Military Training Area, which will be at least twice as large as Camp Ādaži military base. In 2024, during the renovation of the Estonian Ämari Air Base, the Lielvārde Air Base will host NATO's air policing combat aircraft and all support personnel provided by Germany. The presence of the Spanish NASAMS air defence system and its operating personnel, as well as Denmark's decision to continue its battalion-level presence in Latvia, deserve a special mention. In 2023, the Headquarters of the

Multinational Division North in Latvia reached its full operational readiness thereby providing the NATO command element in the Baltic region.

**Latvia welcomed the decisions taken in Vilnius regarding the relations between Ukraine and NATO. In the communiqué of the Vilnius summit, the Allies assured that Ukraine would receive an invitation to join the Alliance as soon as possible.** An agreement was reached at the summit on cutting red tape to speed up the process, and a substantial package of political and practical support was created to bring Ukraine closer to NATO. The first meeting of the newly established NATO-Ukraine Council took place at the summit, where the Allies and Ukraine met as equal partners. The establishment of the council raises the NATO-Ukraine dialogue to the highest level, strengthening political and practical cooperation, as well as envisaging consultations in various crisis situations.

*Ahead of the Washington summit, Latvia's priority is quick and meaningful decision-making on resources for the implementation of NATO's military plans and increasing the Alliance's capabilities.*

The Washington summit will mark NATO's 75th anniversary. At the summit, it is essential to fortify a NATO architecture of credible deterrence and defence, to confirm unwavering practical support for Ukraine, integrating it more and more closely into the structures of transatlantic cooperation, as well as to agree on the analysis of the external threat and the specific steps needed to ward it off.

Latvia continues its support for the strengthening of partnerships with NATO partner countries in Europe – Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, and Moldova – maintaining regular political dialogue and contributing to the resilience of those countries. Being mindful of the close connection between the security of the Euro-Atlantic and the Indo-Pacific regions, regular dialogue between NATO and its partners has continued, including on the challenges posed by China to values, security and interests, as well as the deepening of the China-Russia strategic partnership and its impact on regional and international security. In 2024, NATO is also committed to strengthening resilience and cooperation with its Indo-Pacific partners – Australia, South Korea, Japan, and New Zealand, by jointly advocating for a rules-based international order and addressing cross-border challenges such as disinformation, the fight against hybrid activities and malicious cyber activities. As part of NATO's 360-degree approach to security, consultations will continue on strengthening cooperation and developing individual programmes with NATO partners in Africa and the Middle East, notably the NATO Mediterranean Dialogue (Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Mauritania, Morocco, Tunisia) and the NATO Istanbul Cooperation Initiative countries (the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Kuwait, and Qatar), strengthening regional security and contributing to counter terrorism.

With Finland's accession to NATO and Sweden's accession to the Alliance in the near future, various regional cooperation formats, such as the United Kingdom-led Joint Expeditionary Force and the NB8 format, are playing an increasingly important role in Latvia's security and defence policy. Likewise, the cooperation formats of the Bucharest Nine and the Baltic States and Poland increase regional coordination and Latvia's benefits from NATO membership.

Taking into account that security risks are not only engendered by military threats, an increasingly high profile has been assigned to combat of hybrid threats and to strengthening comprehensive resilience. Over the past year, NATO has accomplished a great deal in the field of hybrid threat analysis, focusing on the risks posed by Russia and China, as well as on the ways to mitigate those risks. An important role in the fight against disinformation is played by the Riga-based NATO Strategic Communication Centre of Excellence, which helps to increase NATO's understanding of

the methods employed in influence operations carried out by Russia and China. Responding to damage done to critical infrastructure in the Baltic Sea, NATO is also paying more attention to the matters of critical infrastructure protection, including closer cooperation with the EU. NATO has stepped up patrols in the Baltic Sea, strengthened the cooperation of intelligence services and engagement with the private sector.

The year 2024 will be marked by resolute strengthening of Latvia's defence capabilities: the large-scale procurements already initiated will proceed, allowing Latvia's defence expenditure to soon approach 3% of GDP, and the construction of the Selonia Military Training Area and military mobility infrastructure will commence. In cooperation with our allies, Latvia's defence industry will be further strengthened and developed. Considering that Latvia has developed Europe's only 5G testing ground for military applications at Camp Ādaži military base, Latvia will support the development of new technologies, products and dual-use solutions for the needs of Latvia and its allies. Latvia will also support more active use of opportunities offered to Latvian companies by NATO's Defence Innovation Accelerator for the North Atlantic (DIANA) and the NATO Investment Fund.

**Strengthening of the EU's defence capabilities is vital for shaping a comprehensive security policy. Latvia stands up for closer cooperation between member states in enhancing defence capabilities.** A regulation has been adopted in support of ammunition production so as to promote an increase in the production capacity of the European defence industry, and an instrument for strengthening the European defence industry through joint procurement has been approved. The purpose of the instrument is to support the cooperation of Member States during the procurement phase. The development of the European Defence Investment Programme to stimulate joint procurement has also been initiated with the aim of approving it in the spring of 2024. In 2024, an important task will be the implementation of the aforementioned EU initiatives, providing the opportunity to Member States, including Latvia, to strengthen their capabilities and develop production. Latvia is currently exploring the ways of using the regulatory framework created by the EU to strengthen the Latvian defence industry.

It is important to continue work on promoting the military mobility of the EU Member States, which is also essential from the point of view of improving defence capabilities. Currently, an agreement has already been reached on procedures for the transboundary movement of military goods and equipment by air and land. An agreement on sea routes is under development. In 2024, work will continue on the implementation of agreements.

Prevention of risks caused by hybrid threats is also high on the EU agenda, including the risks of disinformation, cyberattacks, interference with elections and other democratic processes in the EU and its Member States. The EU has introduced a Hybrid Toolbox, which combines a range of preventive and response tools; consolidated action against information attacks emanating from abroad; and introduced plans to promote the resilience of critical infrastructure. In EU formats, Latvia continues to emphasize the need to promote timely risk awareness and prevention, as well as providing assistance to countries in the EU neighbourhood and partners to counter Russia's hybrid attacks and maintain the relevance of the issue of the instrumentalization of migration while seeking optimal solutions. Given the increase in the number, impact and complexity of malicious cyber activities against the EU and its Member States, including Latvia, the EU Cyber Diplomacy Toolkit has been revised, thereby strengthening the EU's ability to prevent, deter and respond to malicious activities in cyberspace. In 2024, Latvia will continue to advocate for a more active practical application of the toolkit as a deterrent, among other things, by considering the possibility of applying sectoral sanctions in the event of a cyberattack.

## Support to Ukraine and countering Russia's aggression

**Support provided by Latvia to Ukraine since the beginning of the Russian aggression has reached EUR 595 million, which amounts to 0.85% of GDP. Support to Ukraine was provided by maintaining an active interstate dialogue, providing military, financial and humanitarian assistance to mitigate the consequences of Russian aggression and to stimulate the reform processes. Latvia supports Ukraine's European integration efforts and the launch of EU accession negotiations, as well as building Ukraine's military capabilities and implementing the necessary reforms so that Ukraine could join NATO as soon as conditions are met.**

In 2023, demonstrating political support to Ukraine, the senior officials of Latvia – the President, the Speaker of the Saeima, the Prime Minister, and the Minister of Foreign Affairs – visited Ukraine. Likewise, line ministries, the non-governmental sector and members of business community participated in the interstate dialogue. The Saeima has adopted four statements on the anniversary of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, in which the Saeima repeatedly expressed the strongest condemnation of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, as well as its support to Ukraine at the NATO Vilnius Summit, calling for a decision to invite Ukraine to join the Alliance, support the opening of EU accession negotiations with Ukraine and Moldova, as well as the return of illegally displaced Ukrainian children to their homeland as soon as possible. Latvia supports the Peace Initiative led by Ukraine, including involvement in the current work on the overall implementation plan of the initiative, as well as in the work of specific task forces.

The Latvian Foreign Service continued to perform the main coordinating function in order to ensure the provision of financial and humanitarian aid to Ukraine. In close cooperation with public institutions and representatives of the non-governmental sector, the Foreign Service provided consultations and cooperated pragmatically in the implementation of projects to ensure greater effectiveness of support. The macro-financial, humanitarian and development cooperation support provided from the state budget has reached approximately EUR 39 million since the beginning of the war. Those financial resources have been used to make contributions to the UN, the World Bank, the European Investment Bank, the European Bank of Reconstruction and Development and the OECD instruments to support Ukraine and to finance development cooperation projects.

Latvia continued its involvement in the reconstruction process of Ukraine, where special attention is paid to Chernihiv region. In 2023, Latvia allocated EUR 5.1 million for the reconstruction of Ukraine, EUR 3.1 million of which was invested in projects by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. A contract for EUR 2 million has been signed with the UN Development Program in Ukraine for the reconstruction of social infrastructure facilities in the Chernihiv region. In partnership with the Entrepreneurs for Peace Foundation, the reconstruction of six residential buildings and the development of the community centre project in the village of Yahidne have been completed. Centre Marta [Marta Resource Centre for Women], for its part, has opened two support centres in the city and region of Chernihiv for women, victims of violence and war. The Ministry of Environmental Protection and Regional Development carried out a project for the development of spatial planning documents in the Chernihiv region. EUR 2 million was allocated to the Ministry of Economics to facilitate the involvement of Latvian businesses in the reconstruction of Ukraine – 12 modular houses have been brought to Ukraine, 88 inventory units for children's playgrounds, and 3300 furniture units for pre-school educational institutions. In 2024, Latvia will continue to be involved in rebuilding of the Chernihiv region, while also being aware of the opportunities for cooperation with foreign donors in joint projects.

In 2023, alongside projects to overcome the consequences of the war, the implementation continued of projects supporting the European integration of Ukraine, and more than

EUR 500,000 were allocated to that end from the development cooperation budget of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Latvia provided support for good governance, promotion of entrepreneurship and agriculture, training of young professionals, gender equality, and putting in practice of various health and psychological rehabilitation programs. The projects were implemented in cooperation with Marta Resource Centre for Women, the Entrepreneurs for Peace foundation, the Ministry of Finance, the State Forensic Science Bureau, the State Border Guard, the Latvian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the Latvian Rural Consultation and Education Centre, the Riga Investment and Tourism Agency, the National Rehabilitation Centre (NRC) "Vaivari", the Latvian Association of Microsurgeons, the University of Latvia and Riga Graduate School of Law. Latvia will continue to support Ukraine's European integration process, focusing priorities in this area on the capacity building of Ukrainian institutions, promoting the fight against corruption, strengthening internal security structures and national defence capabilities and resilience, developing export capacity and the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area, and raising the capacity to combat disinformation. Since the beginning of the war in Ukraine, through cooperation from Riga East Clinical University Hospital and Pauls Stradiņš Clinical University Hospital, NRC "Vaivari", and the Ministry of Health, 240 Ukrainian soldiers have been treated and undergone rehabilitation in Latvia.

To overcome the consequences of the large-scale humanitarian disaster caused by the explosion of the Kakhovka Dam, assistance in the amount of more than EUR 1 million was provided with the involvement of institutions and agencies of Latvia's Ministry of Interior, municipalities and the non-governmental sector.

Latvia's civil society, business people and the non-governmental sector remain actively involved in supporting Ukraine – support is provided both in the humanitarian and military fields. The organization "Ziedot.lv" has received more than EUR 23.7 million in donations from civil society and companies. Donations are used for the defence sector and medical institutions of Ukraine, and Ukrainian refugees in Latvia. The Entrepreneurs for Peace Foundation continues to actively support Ukraine through providing assistance to the armed forces of Ukraine and delivering humanitarian aid to Ukraine amounting to more than EUR 8.5 million. The "Your Friends" association has provided more than EUR 6 million in support of Ukraine. The "Twitter Convoy" organized by the "Agendum" association is keeping up its weekly deliveries of cars to Ukraine, where the vehicles are mostly used for the needs of the Ukrainian defence sector: more than 2000 cars have already been delivered to Ukraine. At the level of municipalities, support to Ukraine has also been provided by the city of Riga, the districts of Ādaži, Ķekava, Ogre, Preiļi and others supporting specific Ukrainian municipalities and sister cities.

In order to ensure a legal framework for the implementation of programmes and projects in Ukraine, in 2023, an agreement was drawn up for signing between the Government of the Republic of Latvia and the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine on technical and financial cooperation.

At the EU level, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs advocated a change in approach to the support provided to Ukraine, pointing out that it needs to become more systematic and more long-term, being aware that Russia still has sufficient resources to keep up its aggression in Ukraine. Latvia strongly advocates for the establishment of the Ukraine Facility in the amount of EUR 50 billion up to 2027 towards macro-financial and reform implementation support to Ukraine. Latvia supported the extension of exemptions from import customs duties for products manufactured in Ukraine until mid-2024. The EU's trade facilitation provides for the complete exemption of goods originating in Ukraine from import duties, tariff quotas and anti-dumping duties. Those measures complement trade concessions already applicable to Ukrainian products under the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement. Latvia will continue to support Ukraine and the restoration of its economy using EU trade instruments, including considering positively the extension of trade facilitation beyond the middle of 2024. Latvia continued to defend its opinion on reaching an EU-level legal

solution so that Russian funds frozen as a result of sanctions and immobilized assets of the Central Bank would be directed towards the reconstruction of Ukraine.

Latvia continued its support for the "Grain from Ukraine" initiative by contributing EUR 50,000 to it in 2023.

In order to strengthen Ukraine's military capabilities, Latvia continued to provide all kinds of military support to Ukraine on a bilateral basis, the total amount of which has reached EUR 370 million since the beginning of the conflict. Latvia has delivered drones, helicopters, howitzers, weapons and individual equipment, ammunition, anti-tank weapons, as well as Stinger anti-aircraft missiles to Ukraine. The provided military support is coordinated within the Ukrainian defence contact group, in the so-called Ramstein format. Within this format, Latvia has assumed leadership in the Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (drone) Coalition aimed at ensuring maximum availability of drone capabilities for the Ukrainian armed forces. Latvia has also joined the IT Coalition in support of Ukraine, which aims at the creation of a secure, reliable and resilient information and communication technology infrastructure for the Ministry of Defense of Ukraine and its Armed Forces.

***Latvia will continue to support EU and NATO decisionmaking towards assistance to Ukraine in the long term***

Latvia stood up firmly for the adoption of important EU decisions concerning long-term military support of Ukraine, continuing its involvement in the EU Military Assistance Mission in support of Ukraine in 2023. Both in the framework of the mission and bilaterally, Latvia has carried out training for 3000 Ukrainian soldiers, which included providing them with individual equipment. Latvia is ready to provide long-term support in the implementation of the reform of professional military education in Ukraine. In 2023, Latvia supported the seventh support package for Ukraine under the EU's European Peace Facility, ensuring deliveries of military and non-military equipment and ammunition to Ukraine. At the same time, Latvia stands up for the continuity of support and its long-term character through creating a special funding envelope – a Ukraine Support Fund.

At the NATO level, in order to support the interoperability of Ukraine's armed forces with NATO forces and to strengthen resilience, Latvia contributes to the NATO Comprehensive Assistance Package for Ukraine. In 2023, Latvia made a contribution in the amount of EUR 2 million, with contributions of a similar amount expected in 2024 and 2025.

Reaffirming Latvia's readiness to support Ukraine politically, economically and militarily in a long-term perspective, Latvia has acceded to the Joint Declaration of Support for Ukraine signed by the leaders of the G7 countries.

***Latvia will maintain an unwavering position concerning the continuation of a robust sanctions policy by the EU, the Allies and other countries against Russia in order to weaken the aggressor's ability to finance and implement hostilities and to renew its military capabilities.***

Since the beginning of the war, 12 rounds of EU sanctions against Russia have been adopted. In 2023, the EU, in close coordination with like-minded countries, continued to increase the sanctions pressure against Russia, as well as countries that have supported Russian aggression, mainly Belarus and Iran. During the year, a number of decisions were made on the expansion of the EU sector-specific sanctions, including the setting of levels of price caps for petroleum

products of Russian origin and an embargo on diamonds exported from Russia in order to reduce Russia's revenues. Certain further export and transit bans through Russia have been imposed on goods that could be used for military purposes including dual-use items. Restrictions on the spread of Russian propaganda have been expanded. Individual sanctions have also been imposed on almost 400 natural and legal persons who are responsible for Russia's aggression against Ukraine, including officials in Russia and the occupied territories, military industry companies and military personnel, persons responsible for the forced deportation of Ukrainian children, Russian media companies, and figures disseminating propaganda. Sanctions have also been imposed for serious and systematic violations of human rights in Russia, the territories it has occupied in Ukraine, as well as in the African countries, including violations of freedom of speech, torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment, arbitrary arrests or detentions. Latvia supports the introduction of bilateral sanctions by Allies and other countries.

Substantial efforts of the EU and Allied countries in 2023 were devoted to effective implementation of sanctions and mitigation of sanctions evasion risks. An increasing role in the EU, in the Allied countries and at the national level was focused on strengthening cooperation with third countries in order to exclude the possibility of circumventing sanctions through them, especially with regard to goods and technologies that can be used in the military sector. In order to reduce the circumvention of EU sanctions through third countries, Latvia has actively participated in the working groups of experts and high-level sanctions coordinators of EU Member States, as well as contributing to the imposition of new sanctions targeting persons in third countries who try to circumvent EU sanctions. Latvia has reached out bilaterally to the third countries with which an increase in trade is observed in the groups of sanctioned goods, calling for a dialogue on what the trade statistics reveal, as well as proposing operational cooperation mechanisms between customs services.

In order to standardize the application of sanctions and promote the prevention of circumvention of sanctions, in 2023, Latvia significantly intensified cooperation between the three Baltic States, as well as by sharing information and experience with the countries of the NB8 cooperation format on a regular basis (expert working groups on the application of sanctions are held several times a year). In addition to that, in 2023, a new working group of border countries was established, bringing together experts from the ministries of foreign affairs and customs services from Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Finland, and Poland in order to agree on a uniform practice in matters of applying sanctions and detecting and preventing attempts to circumvent them.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, being the coordinating authority on sanctions matters, carries out awareness-raising activities, responding to the submissions of individuals and companies, organizing seminars on sanctions issues, publishing informative materials in the Sanctions section of the Ministry's website, as well as sending out a monthly newsletter on sanctions. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs provides support to the Ministry of Justice in several legal proceedings before the Court of Justice of the European Union, together with the Council of the EU defending the legality and validity of the sanctions imposed by the EU. In 2023, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs drafted amendments to the "Law on International Sanctions and National Sanctions of the Republic of Latvia" with the aim of creating a centralized system and establishing a Financial Intelligence Unit (FIU) as the competent authority for the application of exceptions to sanctions. From April 2024, the FIU will begin full implementation of its newly defined functions. The shaping of sanctions policy in Latvia, the coordination of information circulation and the application of exceptions in relation to strategic goods and humanitarian cases remain within the competence of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

***Russia's aggression against Ukraine has significantly changed the bilateral relations between Latvia and Russia. Bilateral***

***cooperation with Russia has been suspended completely in a number of areas or reduced to the minimum level necessary.***

An extensive audit of the legal framework with Russia was carried out, suspending or denouncing intergovernmental and interdepartmental agreements in areas such as the work of the Intergovernmental Commission, Soviet memorial sites in Latvia, bilateral economic cooperation, cooperation in the field of culture, cross-border travel, double taxation, tourism, environmental protection, anti-monopoly policy, as well as forestry. The process of reviewing bilateral agreements is underway. Since February 2023, Latvia has lowered the level of diplomatic relations with Russia to the level of Chargé d'Affaires a.i. At the same time, the Latvian Embassy in Russia and the Russian Embassy in Latvia are still operational. Amendments to the Immigration Law have entered into force, which lay down procedures for residence in Latvia of the Russian citizens who were previously Latvian citizens or non-citizens. In 2023, the Minister of Foreign Affairs applied the status of persona non grata and an indefinite entry ban in the territory of the Republic of Latvia on 50 Russian citizens, as well as extended the status and entry ban on 157 Belarusian citizens. In order to avoid the security threat caused by Russia's decision to limit the entry of Ukrainian citizens, in October 2023, the operation of two border crossing points – Vientuļi and Pededze – at the Latvian-Russian border were suspended.

Latvia, with support from non-governmental organisations, continues providing assistance to independent media and media workers who have been forced to leave Russia. Latvia's support enables them to continue their professional activities and provide alternative information for audiences in Russia.

**Bilateral relations between Latvia and Belarus are at their lowest point. Latvia continues to regard Belarus as co-responsible for Russia's aggression against Ukraine.** Latvia keeps issues regarding the regime's repression of civil society and human rights violations in Belarus high on the agenda of the EU and the UN, as well as condemning the Belarusian regime for supporting the Russian war in Ukraine and the relocation of illegally deported Ukrainian children to Belarus. The fragility of the security situation in the region is exacerbated by the deepening integration of Belarus and Russia into a Union State, Russia's statements on intentions to deploy tactical nuclear weapons in Belarus, the use of the Belarusian military infrastructure to pursue aggression against Ukraine. At the same time, defamation and discreditation campaigns of neighbouring countries and the West, already bordering on overt displays of hatred, continue in the national media of Belarus.

In 2023, the flow of irregular migrants at the Latvian-Belarusian border facilitated by the Belarusian regime increased rapidly again, and a large share of the citizens of those third countries arrived with Russian-issued entry visas. Latvia, together with Lithuania and Poland, successfully promoted a common understanding of this issue and condemnation of Belarus' actions at EU level. In response to pressure from irregular migration, Latvia suspended the operation of the Silene border crossing point at the border with Belarus in order to ensure the protection and order of the border.

Latvia continues to support an increase in EU sanctions pressure on the Belarusian regime. In August 2023, the seventh round of sanctions against Belarus was adopted for human rights violations and supporting the war in Ukraine. The sanctions it contains have been partly aligned with the sanctions regime targeting Russia so as to prevent circumvention of sanctions, as well as with adding new individuals and companies to the list for supporting Lukashenko's regime.

Latvia continued to support the democratic representatives of Belarus by maintaining regular contacts throughout 2023. Latvia advocated for a coordinated approach by the EU to find a solution to the issue of Belarusian citizens' passports used by members of the opposition after

their expiry date. Latvia has allocated EUR 40,000 to the International Accountability Platform for Belarus for the collection and storage, in accordance with UN standards, of evidence of human rights violations in Belarus pending relevant legal proceedings, as well as the provision of support to politically repressed persons and their family members.

## Facilitating a rules-based international order

**Russia is trying to change national borders with the use of military force, thus replacing the rule of law with a diktat of force. Latvia and like-minded countries call on China and other countries to distance themselves from Russia's actions and condemn them. Latvia, together with like-minded partners, continues to maintain international pressure against Russia.**

Latvia maintains close coordination with like-minded countries and was one of the leading countries in seeking the widest possible support from countries for the UN General Assembly resolution on the anniversary of the Russian aggression, which yet again condemned Russia's aggression against Ukraine. This was the sixth UN resolution since the launch of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, and it reaffirmed strong support from the international community for Ukraine's territorial integrity demanding that Russia immediately and fully withdraw its troops and cease hostilities.

Latvia together with diplomats from other countries reached out actively to global partners about the real causes of Russia's war against Ukraine, its negative impact on the application of international law, on the global economy and prosperity, as well as about the need to hold Russia accountable for the crimes of aggression and war in Ukraine.

As a result, Russia lost its long-held positions in several elected UN bodies in 2023. Overall, the level of Russia's credibility and prestige in international organizations has shrunk. Russia did not win enough votes in 2023 to be re-elected to the UN Human Rights Council. Russia was also not elected to the UN Commission on the Status of Women, the Executive Board of the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the UN Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice. A representative from Russia was not elected as a judge of the International Court of Justice for the first time in its history. Russia was not elected to the Executive Board of UNESCO or any committee or programme for the next 2-year period where a vote was required. Russia has neither been elected to the Executive Council of the Convention on the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons from the Eastern Europe Group nor to the Council of the International Maritime Organization. Russia has not received support among the Eastern European Group for posts on elected bodies of the Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and Their Disposal, the Rotterdam Convention on the Procedure on the Prior Informed Consent in International Trade for Certain Hazardous Chemicals and Pesticides, and the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic pollutants.

**Latvia continues to emphasize the need to hold Russia accountable for its act of aggression.** Latvia is one of 32 States that have intervened as a third party under Article 63(2) of the Charter of the United Nations International Court of Justice in the case of Ukraine v. Russian Federation concerning Allegations of Genocide under the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. As a third party to the case, Latvia has so far submitted both written and oral observations on Article IX of the 1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of Genocide, which is essential for the determination of the jurisdiction of the International Court of Justice.

Latvia continued to support the International Criminal Court, including its warrants of arrest for the Russian President Putin and the Commissioner for Children's Rights in the Office of the President of the Russian Federation, Maria Lvova-Belova, for the unlawful deportation and transfer of children from Ukraine to the territory of Russia. The International Criminal Court has been provided with financial support of an additional EUR 200,000 and two experts have been sent to work there.

Latvia, together with Ukraine, Lithuania, Estonia, Poland, and Romania, is active at an initial stage in the International Centre for the Prosecution of the Crime of Aggression against Ukraine, which was launched in July 2023. It aims to coordinate national investigations and preserve the evidence gathered, thus effectively preparing and facilitating the prosecution of any future perpetrators of the crime of aggression.

Latvia, at the invitation of Ukraine, has joined the Core Group on a tribunal for the crime of aggression against Ukraine, which is discussing possible legal solutions to the creation of a special tribunal.

***Latvia, together with like-minded countries, advocates creation of a special international tribunal for the crime of aggression against Ukraine, which would have broad international support and legitimacy in ensuring that Russia's senior leadership is held accountable.***

Latvia asserts itself as an active UN Member State with participation in elected UN bodies and taking forward thematic priorities where Latvia has expertise.

**Latvia has officially launched a campaign for election to the UNSC for the term of 2026–2027.** The election will enhance Latvia's contribution to the UNSC, the formation of international agenda and international security. It will be a valuable opportunity to strengthen relations with strategic allies, to make a fresh input on the part of Latvia to the EU's foreign policy, as well as to expand the circle of Latvia's friends and partners around the world.

Ahead of the elections in 2025, Latvia will address all UN Member States, including the countries with which cooperation has not been sufficiently active so far. Under the leadership of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, thematic directions for the lobby campaign have been developed in close cooperation with the non-governmental sector: the rule of law and democracy (good governance, the resilience of society and the development of a cohesive society, democracy and human rights, international law); women's empowerment (implementation of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda); security, sustainability and development (climate, water resources, cyber security and digital technologies). During the implementation of Latvia's election campaign, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is interested in further practical exchange of ideas and cooperation with the Latvian non-governmental and public organisations, academic and research institutions, Latvian UN Youth Delegates, the Latvian National Committee for UNESCO, the Diaspora Advisory Council, business associations and mass media.

Latvia has been elected to the UN Commission on the Status of Women and to the Executive Board of the UN Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women). At the UN Committee on Information and the Intergovernmental Council of the UNESCO International Programme for the Development of Communication, Latvia is raising the issues of combating disinformation and strengthening the security of the information space. Latvia has been working

on the UN Commission on Science and Technology for Development of over a long period of time. The Foreign Ministry also made additional contributions to various UN funds in 2023 in order to strengthen Latvia's interests, such as UN peace-building, preventing sexual violence in conflicts, and strengthening children's rights.

In the run-up to the UN's Fourth International Conference on Small Island Developing States (SIDS4) in May 2024, Latvia was elected to the Preparatory Committee for the conference in 2023. This will help Latvia to reinforce contacts and better understand the challenges and interests of the small island countries, especially in the realm of climate. Latvia, together with Guinea, is co-ordinating the review process of the UN High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development and the UN Economic and Social Council, which will require the approval of a respective resolution by the General Assembly in 2024.

In 2023, a resolution was passed to hold a UN Summit of the Future in September 2024 to discuss the need to address the acute global challenges, also taking into account limited progress towards the UN Sustainable Development Goals. Intergovernmental Consultations on the Preparatory Process the event will begin with a view to drawing up the outcome document of the Summit of the Future. It is expected to agree on the necessary action in five large blocks of topics: Sustainable Development Goals and financing for development; peace and security; international cooperation in science, technology and innovation; the inclusion of young people; and transforming global governance. In the run-up to the Summit for the Future, Latvia pays particular attention to the security of the information space in the context of current global challenges. Latvia will lay emphasis on strengthening the understanding that the digital space is subject to international law in the same way as the physical space. Latvia, as a leader on the topic of media and information literacy within the UN framework, will be particularly involved in the creation of the Information Integrity Code of Conduct, as well as in discussions regarding the creation of a new Global Digital Compact. Those processes will focus on not only the positive impact of digital technologies on growth and development, but also challenges in the areas of security and artificial intelligence.

Latvia is actively involved in the process of establishing the UN Cyber Programme of Action and will continue to advocate in 2024 the creation of a transparent, highly inclusive mechanism for action and cooperation with the private sector. The focus will be on advancing responsible state behaviour in cyberspace. Latvia supported the establishment of a network of contact points within the UN, which will facilitate communication among the states in the event of cyber incidents and cyber risks.

***From Latvia's perspective, it is also necessary to strengthen international order through meaningful reform initiatives.***

Russia continues to abuse the UNSC for its own agenda and obstruct its work. This has imparted a renewed momentum to the international community to uphold a debate the need for reform. Latvia advocates a broader and equitable representation of regions on the UNSC, including additional seats for Eastern European, African, Latin American regions and the Small Island Developing States. Latvia will carry on with its activities in the group of like-minded countries on responsibility, coherence and openness with a view to improving UNSC working methods and will actively participate in the format of intergovernmental negotiations on UNSC reforms, inviting countries to constructive negotiations on UNSC reform.

Latvia continues to support the strengthening of the UN "Women, Peace and Security" agenda. Armed conflicts in many parts of the world and their impact on women and girls reaffirm the

relevance of the women, peace and security agenda. In cooperation with the public sector and non-governmental partners, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has been coordinating the national Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security since 2020. Its main tasks are to promote public awareness by means of various seminars and initiatives in Latvia and internationally, to strengthen cooperation on those matters with the Latvian defence and interior sector, as well as to transfer Latvia's experience to other countries through the involvement of the non-governmental sector.

**From May to November 2023, Latvia held the rotating presidency of the decision-making body of the Council of Europe, the Committee of Ministers.** The presidency was implemented by the joint efforts of a number of Latvian institutions and non-governmental partners. An important role was played by the Delegation of the Saeima (the Latvian Parliament) to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. Within six months, 17 thematic events at the international level were organised in Riga and Strasbourg, including meetings of the Ministers of Justice and the Ministers of Education of the Council of Europe's Member States, as well as 16 cultural events.

One of the tasks of the Latvian Presidency was to intensify support from the Council of Europe to Ukraine. In this context, the establishment of a Register of Damage Caused by the Aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine is a major success. The Register of Damage will advance Russia's accountability for crimes committed in Ukraine, and it is the first step towards creating an international compensation mechanism. Latvia, as one of the founding members of the Register, will continue to work on increasing support for this instrument. The Latvian presidency highlighted as a matter of priority the need to take practical steps for the strengthening of Ukraine's justice system and the return of Ukrainian children illegally deported by Russia. Latvia made a voluntary contribution to the Action Plan for Ukraine 2023–2026 prepared within the framework of the Council of Europe, which aims to provide support for the reconstruction and recovery of Ukraine. On the part of Latvia, the request to suspend the employment of Russian citizens in Council of Europe's bodies was consistently maintained, as Russia was expelled from the organisation in 2022. During the presidency, particular attention was paid to the obligation of the Member States of the Council of Europe to implement the decisions of the European Court of Human Rights, as well as to the need to strengthen freedom of expression, the security of journalists and the digital agenda, for instance, in the field of artificial intelligence. A new Council of Europe Campaign for the Safety of Journalists has been launched with the support of Latvia. In its capacity of the Presidency, Latvia insisted on advancing reforms in the organisation – both on greater engagement with civil society and young people in its work, and on transparency and visibility of the functioning of the organisation.

**Development cooperation policy brings Latvia's contribution to the promotion of international stability and sustainable development. In 2023, funding for the implementation of development cooperation policy budgeted by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs amounted to EUR 1,663,813 million.** Assistance to countries in the Eastern Partnership region, Central Asia and Africa continued in 2023. According to the thematic priorities of the development cooperation of Latvia, 56% of the projects implemented contribute to promoting peace and equity, as well as strengthening effective, responsible and inclusive institutions, 17% – to promoting gender equality, 16% – to economic growth, 5% – to quality education, 4% – to climate action. Digitalisation as Latvia's cross-cutting priority was an element in one fifth of the supported projects. 43 projects were implemented in 2023, with a special focus on support projects in Ukraine to help overcome the consequences of the war (36% of all development cooperation projects). Latvia continues carrying out three projects in the African countries of South Africa, Cameroon, Namibia, Zambia and Zimbabwe. The Foreign Service ensured the link of

Latvia's bilateral development cooperation activities with the activities of other donors, thereby promoting the sustainability, effectiveness and visibility of support provided by Latvia, especially in the field of good governance, including training for young professionals, improvement of provision of public services and capacity building in audit institutions. Co-financing of EUR 462,953 has been mobilised in 2023.

A large number of non-governmental partners were involved in the implementation of Latvia's development cooperation, including Marta Resource Centre for Women, Riga TechGirls, Riga Graduate School of Law, #esiLV movement, the Latvian Rural Forum, SIA SunGIS, the Social Entrepreneurship Association, the Baltic Human Rights Society, and the Latvian Platform for Development Cooperation, the Latvian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the Latvian Association of Microsurgeons, the Latvian IT Cluster. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has supported the associations, the Latvian Platform for Development Cooperation and the Latvian Association of Local and Regional Governments, thereby facilitating international-scale involvement of Latvia's civil society in the development cooperation processes and its policy planning.

The Development Cooperation Policy Plan 2024–2027 was approved in 2023. In the coming years, there is a need to further increase funding for the policy so as to develop bilateral relations and assist beneficiary countries. This will contribute to external economic relations, enable a better use of the expertise and solutions available in Latvia to ensure sustainable assistance, as well as provide new opportunities for Latvian public institutions, NGOs and the private sector involved in the implementation of development cooperation projects. The implementation of bilateral development cooperation assistance will promote synergy with security, external economic and migration policies and their instruments.

Latvia renders humanitarian assistance by making voluntary contributions to international organisations to finance humanitarian aid or responding to requests from partner countries by providing support to the country directly affected. Latvia's humanitarian aid expenditure has been increasing in recent years: EUR 1,257,765 in 2020; EUR 2,558,071 in 2021; EUR 3,556,554 in 2022; and EUR 2,812,053 in 2023.

***With participation in international missions and operations, Latvia contributes to peace and security. By 2023, Latvia had engaged, and intends to continue its participation in 2024 in nine UN, EU and NATO international missions and operations in Israel, Lebanon, Ukraine, Georgia, Armenia, the Mediterranean, Kosovo, Iraq, as well as in two multinational coalitions in Iraq and the Strait of Hormuz.***

Latvia is taking part in the European Union Advisory Mission Ukraine (EUAM Ukraine) with four civilian experts, and twelve Latvian civilian experts are working on the European Union Monitoring Mission Georgia (EUMM Georgia). 2023 saw the establishment of the EU Mission in Armenia (EUMA), tasked with observing and reporting on the situation on the ground at the internationally recognised border of Armenia with Azerbaijan. Two Latvian civilian experts are working on that mission. In 2023, Latvia also supported the formation of the EU Partnership Mission in Moldova (EUPM MD) focused on enhancing the country's resilience to hybrid threats. Participation in those missions will continue in 2024.

Latvia continues its participation in the NATO-led international operation in Kosovo (KFOR) with a light infantry company, which is the largest Latvian contingent in international operations. As an indication of Latvia's involvement not only in regions that are geographically close but also in

addressing global challenges, Latvian soldiers were serving in different-sized units on the NATO mission in Iraq (NMI) and the Operation Inherent Resolve of the Global Coalition to defeat ISIL. Latvia continued to take part in the European Union's naval operation in the Mediterranean (EUNAVFOR MED IRINI) with two representatives, and with one – in the mission of the UN Truce Supervision Organisation (UNTSO) in Jerusalem. In 2023, participation began, with three peacekeepers, in the UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL). Participation continued in the initiative for restoring security of shipping, the International Maritime Security Construct, with plans to send a Latvian naval officer to the Coalition Task Force (CTF) Sentinel in 2024.

Latvia remains part of the European Union Military Assistance Mission in support of Ukraine (EUMAM Ukraine) launched in 2022 to provide training to Ukrainian armed forces. Participation in the mission will continue throughout 2024.

**Even before the war started by Russia against Ukraine, erosion was apparent in the arms control system. Russia has long ignored confidence-building international agreements and the commitments set out in them.** Russia's decision to suspend its participation in the US-Russia New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (New START), withdraw from the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe, withdraw ratification of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty, and statements about its deployment of nuclear weapons in Belarus in violation of the terms of the Budapest Memorandum and the Treaty on Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, reiterates Russia's overall nihilism toward international law and obligations. Such actions by Russia have a significant impact on strategic stability. At the NPT Preparatory Committee meeting, the Baltic States, in a joint statement, highlighted Russia's role in the erosion of arms control formats and called on Russia to stop its destructive behaviour in the existing formats of arms control, non-proliferation and disarmament, and to fulfil its obligations under them with responsibility.

In May 2023, the Fifth Chemical Weapons Convention Review Conference was held, at the end of which, states-parties failed to agree on a joint outcome document. Such incidents are increasingly common in the non-proliferation and disarmament formats and threaten the viability of those formats.

A negative trend in arms control persisted due to North Korea's nuclear program, the increasing number of missile tests banned by countless UNSC resolutions and the low threshold contained in nuclear doctrine for potential use of nuclear weapons. Iran continued to evade its commitment to nuclear non-proliferation by enriching uranium above the civilian use level, leading to a further reduction in the possibility of restarting the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action. China continued to develop strategic armament systems, while demonstrating an elusive attitude towards involvement in the strategic arms control mechanisms.

Latvia, along with Allies and like-minded nations, will continue to remind Russia of return to the implementation of the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (New START) and emphasize that China must assume the responsibility befitting a nuclear state by engaging in international arms control mechanisms.

Latvia, together with its Allies and partners, will continue to emphasize the importance of arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and existing mechanisms for international and national security. Together with other EU Member States, Latvia will call on Iran and North Korea to comply with international rules on arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, including UNSC resolutions. Latvia underlines the role of the International Atomic Energy Agency in verifying the use of nuclear energy for peaceful purposes. Within the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe

(OSCE), Latvia will call for confidence- and security-building measures, while urging Russia and Belarus to stop aggression against Ukraine and return to full compliance with their commitments in order to contribute to the improvement of the security situation in Europe.

**The influence of digital technologies on global security and policy is increasing.** The rapid development of **artificial intelligence (AI)** technologies is an emerging factor in international relations. They will create opportunities in almost all fields: accelerate the development of science, expand medical opportunities, impart a new impetus to economy, expand access to education and allow for improved public services. But AI not only offers opportunities, but also creates still underestimated risks. The AI technologies are becoming increasingly accessible to countries and other parties who could use them, ignoring human rights and for purposes contrary to global security and the interests of democratic countries. The AI capabilities can be applied to reinforce mechanisms of digital authoritarianism – tracking, repression and information manipulation. Therefore, international norms in the area of AI must be developed without delay, based on anthropocentricity, ethics and respect for human rights. At the same time, democracies must also maintain and develop technological leadership that will enable solutions to be found to the risks of misuse of AI. Latvia must also play an active part in this process. It is important that work on the EU Artificial Intelligence Act is successfully completed. It will be the world's first comprehensive artificial intelligence law, which will also be able to serve as a guide to shaping international standards in this area, balancing the opportunities and risks posed by AI.

**Disinformation** remains a global challenge. In the context of both the Russian aggression against Ukraine and escalation in the Middle East following the Hamas terrorist attack on Israel, the response from online platforms to illegal content remains inadequate. In 2023, the Digital Services Act, an EU-wide regulatory instrument, has entered into force to address the risks posed by disinformation and illegal content on online platforms while guaranteeing and strengthening freedom of expression. The biggest challenge now will be to ensure the effective implementation of the new framework.

**Global internet freedom has continued its decline.** The vision of democratic countries of a free, open, global, secure and reliable internet in many parts of the world competes with the model offered by authoritarian nations, especially China, which envisages state control over the internet, its fragmentation, censorship and lack of privacy. It is important for Latvia to engage both in the development of international norms and in practical action in order to defend the freedom of the internet. Latvia joined the Global Declaration on Information Integrity Online, whereby the participating States express their commitment to open, free, reliable and secure information environments.

## The EU's foreign and security policy

**Successful implementation of the EU's foreign and security policy is important in order to achieve Latvia's foreign policy objectives, including by promoting regional and global security and stability. This is particularly true of the EU enlargement process, the development of cooperation with the neighbouring regions of the EU, and relations with the United Kingdom (UK), the Indo-Pacific countries, and China.**

**The Middle East has seen the largest escalation of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in recent years, with the potential of a spill-over into a broader regional conflict.** Latvia has strongly condemned the terrorist attacks by Hamas on Israeli civilians. The EU, including Latvia, recognises

Israel's right to self-defence in compliance with international law, including humanitarian law. It is crucial to avoid aggravation of the humanitarian crisis. Latvia, along with the rest of the EU, has expressed solidarity with Israel and provided assistance to Palestinian civilians through contributions to international agencies and non-governmental organisations involved in humanitarian aid. Latvia supports efforts by the UN, the EU and other international efforts to reduce immediate tensions, and to counter threats to security of Israel and to Palestinian civilians. In the future, it is essential to return to political dialogue in order to move towards a sustainable two-state solution.

**It is in Latvia's interests to develop constructive and pragmatic cooperation with the UK, both bilaterally, through the EU and NATO as well as in regional cooperation formats.** In the EU framework, after two years of problems with the implementation of the Northern Ireland Protocol, a principles-based political agreement (The Windsor Framework) on underlying principles for new practical arrangements was reached in 2023. The agreement has made a positive impact on the relations between the EU and the United Kingdom opening up the way for closer cooperation. One of the most significant practical successes of 2023 is the agreement on the UK's participation in EU science programmes, Horizon and Copernicus, from 2024 onwards. The EU and the UK share an interest in strengthening the common foreign, security and defence policy, as well as cooperation in the format of the Windsor Framework and the EU-UK Trade and Cooperation Agreement. The UK is an important economic partner to Latvia, a close Ally in NATO and in questions of support to Ukraine. A regular political dialogue continued in 2023, with a series of bilateral visits, including active parliamentary contacts. Latvia also makes the most of cooperation opportunities with the United Kingdom in the NB8 format and in the Joint Response Force, with particular emphasis on cooperation in the areas of security and defence. The United Kingdom, with its permanent military presence in the Baltic region, makes a significant contribution to strengthening Latvia's security. Cooperation projects have been implemented in improving energy resilience, combating disinformation, and media development.

*Significant progress has continued concerning the EU enlargement policy, with the European Council adopting a historic decision on the opening of EU accession negotiations with Ukraine and Moldova, granting of EU candidate status to Georgia, and on launching accession negotiations with Bosnia and Herzegovina when compliance with membership criteria is achieved. Latvia welcomes the progress made by Albania, Montenegro and North Macedonia in the process of accession negotiations, inter alia by achieving full alignment with the EU's common foreign and security policy.*

Latvia has consistently advocated a process of EU integration based on the fulfilment of criteria by all the countries involved, expecting their unequivocal support for European values and political will to implement reforms. Latvia is focusing in particular on the coherence of its foreign policy with the Common Foreign and Security Policy of the EU, freedom of the media, and the rule of law. Latvia will continue to support the countries involved in the process of European integration by sharing its reform experience and applying development cooperation policy instruments.

**In the South Caucasus, a new geopolitical dynamic was created by Azerbaijan's military operation in Karabakh,** resulting in a mass exodus of Karabakh Armenians to Armenia and

causing a humanitarian crisis. Latvia advocated an EU presence and engagement in the South Caucasus region and the promotion of peace and stability in the region in order to prevent a possible deterioration of the humanitarian or security situation in the context of the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict. Latvia actively engaged in discussions to define the instruments available to the EU for visible action and engagement, and has provided Armenia with support to mitigate the humanitarian crisis in the amount of EUR 100,000. As a result of the conflict, Armenia's attitude towards the EU has changed positively, which Latvia believes should be used to intensify cooperation between the EU and Armenia. The EU-Azerbaijani dialogue also needs to be developed.

**Differentiated cooperation should continue as part of the EU's Eastern Partnership policy, taking into account the individual interests and priorities of each partner country in its relations with the EU.** At the same time, it is necessary to adapt those policies to the new geopolitical conditions, with a greater emphasis on strengthening their resilience both through reform processes and by promoting their resilience in terms of security, including against hybrid threats and cyber threats. In this process, it should be noted that EU financial support under the Eastern Partnership policy remains an important instrument for the implementation of national reform processes and cross-border infrastructure projects.

**In 2023, active political and sectoral dialogue between Latvia and Central Asian countries has been carried forward.** The bilateral agenda was largely driven by Russia's military aggression in Ukraine and its impact on the Central Asian region, including on the development of mutual trade and transit and logistics issues in the context of EU sanctions against Russia and Belarus. The good groundwork for bilateral diplomatic relations contributed to the legal protection of a Latvian citizen in one of the countries of the region in the face of Russia's political pressure. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs is continuing an active dialogue with Central Asian countries to guarantee the protection of citizens on the basis of bilateral treaties and international law. The matter is also actively coordinated within the EU in its relations with the countries of the region. Latvia is interested in expanding its presence during 2024 in a practical manner while promoting EU connectivity with the region, including in the context of the EU Global Gateway initiative. To build cooperation with the Central Asian region, the development of connections was promoted between the alternative transport corridor TRACECA (Europe-Caucasus-Asia) and the Baltic region and Northern Europe through Latvia. A Joint Statement has been signed between Latvia and Central Asian countries on the strengthening of cooperation in transport and logistics. Latvia continued to reinforce its presence in EU-Central Asia relations by sending a representative to the EU Special Representative's Office. The Latvian State Border Guard moved forward successfully with the management of Latvia's largest EU project (EUR 21.65 million), the Border Management Programme in Central Asia (BOMCA), while the involvement of Latvian experts was extended as part of other EU projects in the region.

**Strengthening relations with the strategically important Indo-Pacific region, both at EU level and bilaterally, is increasing in importance** when it comes to explaining views on European and global security challenges and to seek solutions to protracted conflicts in the region, as well as global challenges such as climate, health and others. The region is particularly important for promoting economic resilience and diversifying supply chains. To achieve those objectives, dialogue with the region is being built through the EU-India Trade and Technology Council and digital and green partnerships, work on the extension of the network of partnerships and free trade agreements is underway, and high-level meetings are being organised. 2024 will be particularly active in the EU's dialogue with the region as there are plans to hold the EU Indo-Pacific Ministerial Forum, the EU-ASEAN Ministerial Meeting, the EU-Korea Summit and the EU-

Japan Summit. Bilaterally, Latvia held in-person political consultations with Indonesia, Thailand, Singapore, Australia and New Zealand in 2023. An Agreement for Avoidance of Double Taxation with Respect to Taxes on Income and Prevention of Tax Evasion and Avoidance between Latvia and Pakistan was signed, and a Latvian-Japanese Agreement regarding a Working Holiday Scheme entered into force. Latvia will further strengthen its relations with the countries of the region in 2024 as well, focusing on the signing of double taxation and air traffic agreements and strengthening political dialogue at various levels. The planned opening of the Embassy of India in Riga could bring a new impetus to Latvia's relations with India.

**China continues its efforts to consolidate its global economic and political influence, offering, among other things, an alternative view and advancing initiatives aimed at transforming the international system based on universal values to suit its interests.** China's rivalry with the US has escalated, tensions in the Taiwan Strait have been rising and China's increasingly assertive and interest-driven policies in the Indian-Pacific region continue. A deepening of relations between China and Russia is evident. China's reserved stance, the avoidance of condemnation of Russia and the proliferation of its narratives in the domestic and international environment raise genuine concerns. At the same time, the human rights situation has deteriorated and authoritarian tendencies in China have intensified.

Against this background, in 2023, Member State leaders approved a revised EU approach to relations with China. It recognises the need to continue the EU's multilevel approach to China as a partner, economic competitor and systemic rival in advocating balanced trade relationships, highlighting the need to reduce critical dependencies and strengthen supply chains. The EU has called on China to use its special relationship with Russia to halt Russia's aggression in Ukraine, has highlighted the maintaining of Taiwan's status quo and advocated respect for human rights in China. The EU continues its work to reduce risks by promoting the EU's competitiveness and resilience, making full use of autonomous trade instruments, and further developing a strategy for market diversification. Latvia is taking part in the formation of the EU's policy for China, including by standing up for the importance of the geopolitical background and respect for economic reciprocity. On bilateral terms, Latvia pursues constructive relations with China, evaluating the possibilities for developing bilateral dialogue on the basis of mutual benefit and in accordance with the common approach of the EU and the national interests of Latvia.

**The matters coming out on top in Baltic cooperation in 2023, as in the previous year, were security issues, energy security and support for Ukraine.** Expressing its firm determination to strengthen its anti-aircraft defence capabilities and to promote the implementation of the rotating presence model of NATO aircraft units, a declaration on cooperation in the Baltic airspace was signed during the Vilnius Summit. In order to facilitate the strengthening of energy independence, the Baltic States agreed on speeding the synchronisation of the Baltic States' electricity grid with the Continental European Network. Cooperation between the countries on the issue of the Russian aggression was very close, especially when it came to support for international initiatives. The Baltic States jointly advocated for Russia's isolation and accountability for the crime of aggression, actively promoting the idea of setting up an international tribunal at the UN. With the intensification of hybrid attacks on the borders of the Baltic States, national cooperation in internal affairs deepened, and border security is a good example of this. The Baltic Assembly traditionally played an important role in strengthening the unity of the Baltic States and in defending common interests. Regional security, including security of critical infrastructure, strengthening of regional connectivity, support to Ukraine, including concerted implementation of sanctions, are the cooperation priorities for the Baltic Assembly and the Baltic Council of Ministers set by Lithuania for 2024, which Latvia supports.

**In implementing the coordination of NB8 cooperation in 2023, Latvia drew increased attention to the need to build a strong and comprehensive response at the regional level to Russian aggression through setting three lines of action for NB8 cooperation: strengthening the rules-based international order; strengthening military security and deterrence capabilities; and strengthening resilience.** The Latvian Foreign Ministry has organised 18 meetings on various foreign policy topics in the NB8 format. For the first time in that format, the Ministry held meetings of Legal Directors, Directors for Development Cooperation Policy and Directors for Arms Control, Disarmament and Non-Proliferation; those meetings, having been appreciated by partners, shall now be included in the NB8 Annual Coordination Plan. In April 2023, the Foreign Ministers of the NB8 countries visited Moldova (Chisinau) and Ukraine (Odessa), reaffirming common support by the NB8 and demonstrating the unity of the countries. This joint visit was co-ordinated by Latvia. Meanwhile, during the NB8 Foreign Ministers' meeting in Riga, ministers expressed their joint support for Ukraine and agreed that close cooperation between the Baltic States and the Nordic countries is particularly important for the security and resilience of the region, given that the Baltic Sea region experiences geopolitical changes more acutely. In 2023, there was also active coordination between NB8 countries in UN formats, notably the Human Rights Council and the Committees of the General Assembly. Around 100 joint NB8 statements on various topics were delivered at the Human Rights Council and the UN General Assembly. During the meeting of Directors for Human Rights in Riga in February, an agreement was reached on NB8 guidelines for cooperation on human rights. The NB8 format played a key role in the annual meeting of Governors of the World Bank Group and the International Monetary Fund to prevent the adoption of a joint statement that does not explicitly mention and condemn Russia's war against Ukraine.

Close cooperation between the Baltic and Nordic countries will remain a priority, dominated by regional security issues. Finland's accession to NATO, and Sweden joining the Alliance in the near future will contribute to an even closer integration of the region.

# Economic growth and competitiveness, a stronger EU and an increase in its global influence



The global economy has been facing a period of dynamic change marked by overall uncertainty. The rise in geopolitical tensions, exacerbated by the Russian aggression in Ukraine, a recovery from the pandemic, rapid technological progress, rising inflation and climate change are posing new challenges. There is a tendency among third countries to pursue trade policies with a protectionist bias and even weaponization of trade for their strategic objectives. The issue of promoting economic resilience, to which the EU is paying increasing attention, comes to the forefront. From Latvia's perspective in this context, there are the following priority directions: formulation of a sustainable energy policy; implementation of a climate neutrality policy; strengthening of the Single Market and competitiveness; increasing sectoral resilience; further digitalisation and development of connectivity; formation of a network of free trade agreements; respect for the rule of law; and reduction of hybrid threats. It is in Latvia's interests that the EU's geopolitical and economic influence increases worldwide. An important challenge will be the timely preparation of the EU for the accession of new Member States, where a review of the institutional and policy adaptation has already begun. Latvia will continue to advocate an open free trade environment based on transparency and an effective legal framework. The rules-based international trade order creates additional opportunities for Latvian companies and enables economic growth and sustainable development in the EU and the world; therefore, Latvia will continue to stand up for reinforcing these principles in cooperation with third countries. Diversification of Latvian export markets still remains highly relevant.

## An internally more effective and resilient Europe

**2024 will be the year of cyclical institutional change in the EU, with the launch of a newly elected European Parliament and a new European Commission, and the appointment of a large number of new EU officials. At the same time, the EU's future political priorities, or the Strategic Agenda for 2024–2029, will also be approved, the overarching objective of which is to create a clear strategic plan – general policies and priorities for the coming years.** The current EU Strategic Agenda identified the protection of citizens and freedoms as priorities; strong and dynamic economic fundamentals; building a climate-neutral, green, fair and social EU; promoting the EU's interests and values in the world. Latvia expects the new strategic work programme to ensure the necessary continuation in the implementation of political priorities, also taking into account the new geopolitical reality, when instability and pressure on the rules-based international order, protectionism and competition for resources and technologies are increasing. In previous discussions on the Strategic Agenda, Latvia has been calling, and will call for further work on the development of the Single Market in order to prevent

fragmentation, ensure a level playing field for Member States and economic openness, and promote the EU's global competitiveness. Latvia will keep emphasising the need for the EU to develop its military capabilities, address the challenges of the ageing population, employment and illegal migration, as well as prepare the Union for enlargement.

**The EU remained focused on issues of economic resilience and global competitiveness.** Latvia was actively involved in the preparation of the Resilient EU2030 report initiated by the Spanish Presidency, where Latvia called for particular attention to be paid to challenges in the sectors of energy, digital technologies and demography. At the same time, the European Commission presented a European Economic Security Strategy identifying key economic security risks such as the resilience of supply chains, physical and cyber security of critical infrastructure, the security of technologies and their possible transfer to third countries, as well as economic dependence or economic coercion. The response supported by Latvia is the strengthening of the EU's competitiveness (a strong single market, investment in skills and building a technological and industrial base for research in the EU), protecting the EU's economic security (making a more assertive use of existing policies and tools and adopting new policies and instruments), broadening partnerships with different countries, *inter alia* by facilitating trade agreements, and strengthening the international rules-based economic order. This strategy provides the basis for discussions with Member States on economic security with a view to establishing a common framework for risk mitigation and protection of the EU's economic security. The European Commission and Member States have launched an in-depth assessment of risks identified in the strategy, to be followed by the formulation of common solutions. A European Critical Raw Materials Act has been developed to ensure the EU's access to a secure, diverse, affordable and sustainable supply of critical raw materials, thereby reducing the dependence of the EU and also Latvia on unreliable and unpredictable raw materials suppliers.

**Given that the enlargement of the EU is assuming an increasingly clear shape, an EU-wide discussion has begun on the effective functioning of the enlarged EU in the future.** Latvia will have to define its vision for the future of EU policies, EU institutions and decision-making in 2024 in coordination with other sectors and groups of society. The most complicated discussions concerning adaptation will address the EU's common agricultural policy and cohesion policy. At the same time, it will be important for Member States to agree on the most suitable model, allocation and size of the EU budget, which would both meet the needs of the Member States and make possible the successful implementation of the EU's long-term objectives, such as the green and digital transition, and provide the necessary support for Ukraine's reconstruction. At the same time, Latvia is of the opinion that the current EU framework treaties are flexible enough and no amendments are necessary to allow the EU to accept new Member States.

**Intensive work has been invested in the mid-term review of the EU's multi-annual budget, aimed at strengthening EU priorities and responding to the rising budget programme costs.** In the course of the consultation, Latvia called, as a matter of priority, for work to be done on reaching an agreement on the provision of stable and predictable funding in support of Ukraine. The mid-term review envisages the creation of a specific instrument for Ukraine, which would also contribute to the country's reconstruction, modernisation and social cohesion with a view to its gradual integration into the EU. At the same time, during the negotiation process, Latvia underlined that the mid-term review would not negatively affect the priorities and funding already set for the long-term objectives of the EU; it should also promote uniform conditions and territorial, social and economic convergence between Member States. It is important to note that the review will not have a negative impact on national earmarked funding in the cohesion policy and the common agricultural policy and no allocations have been reduced as part of the review. It

is also expected that the final agreement will include additional funding allocation to the European Defence Fund in order to advance the development of innovative defence products and cross-border industry cooperation, as well as the involvement of researchers in the development of the defence industry sector.

**Strengthening the EU Single Market has long been recognised as one of Latvia's EU priorities.** In view of the decisions taken by the EU regarding the weakening of state aid rules in order to address the economic difficulties, it has been important for Latvia to fight for fair competition in the Single Market. In 2023, work on a number of pieces of legislation to expand extraction of critical raw materials and production of green technologies in the EU was launched to strengthen the global competitiveness and productivity of the Union, thereby reducing dependency on unreliable suppliers and supply chain partners, which is also important for Latvia. In order to ensure further deepening and functioning of the Single Market, an independent report on the future of the Single Market is being prepared on a request from the European Council. At the same time, at the invitation of the European Commission, a report is being drawn up on the future of European competitiveness.

***One of the long-term priorities of the EU and Latvia remains the mitigation of climate change and its consequences, with a view to achieving climate neutrality in 2050.***

On the path towards the objective of climate neutrality, 2023 saw the conclusion of work on the main legislation for the EU Green Deal Fit for 55 legislative package, which aims to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 55% by 2030 (compared to 1990 levels). In order to achieve the set goals, Latvia is working on the implementation of legislation and elaboration of the national energy and climate plan.

In November–December 2023, the 28th Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP28) was held in Dubai, United Arab Emirates. The event marked the first assessment of the progress made by the world's countries towards achieving climate targets. For the first time in history, the Global Stocktake decision refers to the move away from fossil fuels, calling upon countries to take steps to triple the capacity of renewable energy globally by 2030, and to double the rate of energy efficiency improvements. The assessment notes that currently existing national commitments are not sufficient to meet the objectives of the Paris Agreement and encourages countries to come up with more ambitious emission reduction targets by 2025, covering all sectors of the economy and in line with the plan to limit global warming to 1.5 °C. Latvia actively participated in the entire work of COP28, joining and supporting, among other things, a number of documents prepared as the result of broad consultations, such as the COP28 UAE Declaration on Sustainable Agriculture, Resilient Food Systems and Climate Action, the COP28 UAE Declaration on Climate and Health, the Global Renewables and Energy Efficiency Pledge, the Environmental Declaration, initiated by Ukraine, and several other documents. Latvia was the first country to respond and contribute to the UN Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) providing support to developing countries to mitigate and address the impact of climate-related disasters. Latvia welcomes the COP28 agreement on the establishment of a Loss and Damage Fund, which will be crucial to support the countries worst affected by climate change in the future. During the COP28, Latvia drew attention to the Russian war and ecocide in Ukraine, which is a deliberate worsening of the ecological and environmental quality by this aggressor country in Ukraine.

**Significant progress was made with strengthening the EU's energy independence. Decisions taken by Latvia and the EU regarding the level of filling up of natural gas storage facilities, joint natural gas purchases and energy saving measures have made it possible to diversify energy supply sources, ensure a continued flow of energy resources, as well as facilitating transition to a wider use of renewable energy sources.** The foundations of the long-term energy policy will be reinforced by the agreement reached on the reform of the electricity market, while adapting it to the new geopolitical situation. It aims to ensure that electricity prices are less dependent on volatile fossil fuel prices, to protect consumers from price hikes, to accelerate the use of renewables, and to improve consumer protection.

Latvia was one of the first in the EU to ban the imports of natural gas from Russia and, due to diversified supply routes, was able to switch fully to liquefied natural gas supplies through Lithuanian and Finnish terminals. In order to ensure the supply of natural gas in times of crisis, a Memorandum of Understanding has been signed on co-operation between Estonia and Latvia for joint utilisation of the Paldiski liquefied natural gas terminal.

To fully end energy dependence on Russia as soon as possible, the Baltic States have pledged to synchronise with the Mainland European Networks by February 2025, almost a year earlier than originally planned. The transmission system operators of Latvia, Estonia and Germany have signed a memorandum of intent on the establishment of the Baltic WindConnector electricity transmission interconnection in the Baltic Sea, which provides for the laying of a cable of approximately 750 km on the seabed between Germany and Estonia. This will open up the possibility of connecting high-capacity offshore wind farms in the future, enabling the Baltic States to become exporters of green electricity to the European electricity market. Latvia intends to conclude the process of accession to the International Energy Agency in 2024.

## **EU external trade policy**

**The EU will continue facing significant global competition in the coming years, which is why the need for a proactive approach to trade policy is growing, thereby ensuring that strong and strategic alliances have credible and like-minded partners.**

Given that the EU is heavily dependent on imports of critical raw materials from third countries, it is essential to promote diversification of supply chains and outlets through engaging with as wide a range of partners as possible thereby providing access to resources that are important for the green and digital transition. The EU focuses on opening up more market opportunities and ensuring trade and investment flows to prevent loss of competitiveness and to attract investment. The conclusion of new free trade agreements and strategic partnerships is essential. While the EU is already one of the world's largest trading networks for the moment, its future economic growth, resilience and prospects for achieving sustainability goals will depend on its ability to adapt to changing international environments. It is also important to underline that those agreements allow for greener and more sustainable trade, ensuring the global transfer of EU values and strengthening international human rights and environmental standards.

In 2023, agreements with New Zealand and Chile as well as the Economic Partnership Agreement with Kenya were added to the list of EU Free Trade Agreements. An active negotiation effort took place with Australia, Mexico, India, Indonesia, and Thailand. The signing of the Association Agreement with the Mercosur countries (Brazil, Argentina, Paraguay, Uruguay) remains a high

priority on the EU's agenda, but there has been no breakthrough due to the different positions of the parties on sustainability issues.

In 2024, it is important for Latvia to make every effort, in cooperation with the European Commission and other EU Member States, to enter into agreements with Mercosur countries and Australia, which, as a large and heavily protected market, has a high potential, which is also not yet fully exploited. Those agreements will open up new export opportunities, allowing Latvian companies and sectors to increase their competitiveness in priority areas.

## The World Trade Organisation

**The World Trade Organisation (WTO), as a result of global challenges and changes in the international environment, requires direct and focused attention from its Member States.** The WTO's reconstruction efforts in the form of an institutional reform in 2023 were one of the most important lines of action by the WTO and its Member States to put in practice the results of the 12th Ministerial Conference that took place in 2022. In 2024, the key task will be to review and reinstate the dispute settlement system by reforming the WTO Appellate Body, which is essential to avoid an escalation of trade conflicts.

It is in Latvia's long-term interest to have a rules-based, stable and predictable global trading environment, where trade regulations address the challenges in this area. Therefore, ahead of the WTO 13th Ministerial Conference in 2024, Latvia will advocate the development of trade regulations in the areas of environment and climate, the digital sector, agriculture and food security, investment attraction, and the extension of the scope of regulations for topical issues such as subsidies and a level playing field in industry.

## Latvia's membership in the OECD

**The OECD continues to make a significant contribution to Latvia's reform process. Over the past period, with the participation of experts of the organisation, Latvia implemented several projects to improve the policy, some of them with financing under the Technical Support Instrument of the European Commission.** Bilateral projects were carried out in areas such as housing affordability, child protection in cases of violence, improvement of digital services by the State Employment Agency, skills development among employees, monitoring of the quality of education, e-tools in the justice system, as well as improving public administration by increasing its efficiency and innovation capacity. In 2024, the OECD Economic Outlook on Latvia is expected to appear, with its content devoted to promoting investments in the national economy of Latvia. Latvia also welcomes OECD work on the use of artificial intelligence in public administration.

Latvia actively participated in the implementation of the OECD Global Relations Strategy, emphasizing issues important to us both on a global and regional level, including the OECD Eurasia Competitiveness Programme, which includes the Eastern Partnership and Central Asian countries that are priorities for Latvia. Moldova's moving closer to the OECD was supported. Latvian officials and representatives of non-governmental organisations participate as qualified experts in a number of OECD projects in Moldova, Armenia, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, and Kazakhstan, sharing Latvia's best practice abroad.

Latvia has further supported a deeper partnership between the OECD and Ukraine. Latvia had actively argued for the need to develop the Ukraine Country Programme, which will simultaneously support Ukraine's European integration efforts and serve as its reconstruction tool for the multi-agency donor coordination platform run by the US, the EU and Ukraine. Latvia has financially supported the transfer of the activities of the OECD Ukrainian Office from Paris to Kyiv by making a voluntary contribution of EUR 10,000. Latvia has also made a voluntary contribution of EUR 30,000 for the implementation of the OECD Ukraine Country Programme, which was signed in the framework of this year's OECD Council of Ministers.

## Bilateral economic cooperation

**The Latvian Foreign Service, in co-operation with the Latvian Investment and Development Agency, has provided and will continue to provide support to enterprises in entering new markets and increasing export volumes, as well as to promote Latvia as an attractive place for foreign investments, seeking to mobilise foreign capital inflow to the national economy from the OECD and other countries.**

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Riga has maintained constant co-operation with business organisations and sectoral associations in order to identify problems and priorities, organise educational seminars on specific topics and countries or regions, provide consultations and other support to Latvian businesses in entering of external markets. Meetings of the Foreign Economic Policy Coordination Council are organised under the chairmanship of the Minister for Foreign Affairs. Latvian diplomatic missions abroad have undertaken practical measures as part of their day-to-day work to assist with solving various issues and problems encountered by Latvian business people in foreign markets. Foreign visits of senior Latvian officials, as well as regional visits of Ambassadors, during which new opportunities for cooperation in the economy are being identified, are important. The broad network of the Latvian Honorary Consuls worldwide, as well as the activities of diaspora organizations, also provides a significant contribution to national economy. During 2023, the Ambassadors of Latvia made 97 regional visits, 413 bilateral meetings of an economic nature have taken place, Latvia and its companies set up stands at 74 international exhibitions, and embassies organised or visited 174 other events, which have been useful in pursuit of the economic interests of Latvia.

Over 2003, the share of African countries in Latvia's exports has increased considerably to include countries such as Mali, Tanzania, Liberia, Namibia, and Burkina Faso. In order to further strengthen cooperation with the region, the Foreign Minister on his visit to Ghana and Benin was accompanied by a business delegation. Within the framework of the visits, the Latvian Business Forum was held with participation of representatives from Latvia's information and communication technologies, education, science, research and innovation, as well as timber and chemical industries. Likewise, the President on his visits to Azerbaijan and Portugal was accompanied by business delegations. A Memorandum of Understanding between the Investment and Development Agency of Latvia and the Export and Investment Promotion Agency of Azerbaijan was signed in Azerbaijan addressing prospects for future cooperation in information and communication technologies, smart energy, green technologies, transport and logistics, and tourism. For his part, the Minister of Economy went on visits to Saudi Arabia and the Republic of Korea together with business delegations. An intergovernmental agreement on economic cooperation was signed with Saudi Arabia, and several memoranda were signed with the Republic

Korea on cooperation in biomedicine, in the field of start-ups, ICT and quantum technologies, as well as promotion of investment.

In June 2023, the United States Trade Representative, Katherine Tai, made her first visit to Latvia. During that period, several meetings were held with Latvian officials and members of the business and scientific community for a discussion on bilateral economic cooperation and transatlantic economic relations issues, including on cooperation in the EU-U.S. Trade and Technology Council (TTC), as well as economic security aspects. The visit to Riga Technical University was a good opportunity for introducing the US Trade Representative to Latvia's achievements in the field of quantum technology. Latvian companies Latvijas Mobilais Telefons (LMT), MikroTik, Lightspace, and Tilde, on their part, made presentations on opportunities for cooperation in the field of information and communication technologies.

Latvians abroad also make considerable contribution towards Latvia's economic interests. For the fourth time, the largest Latvian business conference in the United States, SPOTLIGHT Latvia, was held in September 2023 in Boston, USA, with participation of the President of Latvia and the Minister of Foreign Affairs.

Its connectivity, integration into regional and European transport networks and corridors play an important role in strengthening Latvia's economic position. Alongside exports and investment attraction, those issues have also been the focus of attention of the Foreign Service, ensuring the necessary involvement of the diplomatic service in railway connectivity issues (RailBaltica, renewal of the Riga-Tartu line). The entry of Stena Line into the Ventspils port and the commencement of regular ferry services to Sweden is a major result of economic diplomacy efforts, which will ensure foreign investments in the long term, as well as promoting modernisation of the Ventspils port and creation of a port complying with the green transition standards in the Baltic Sea. The functioning of Stena Line, which has been successfully providing regular ferry links between the Ventspils port and Sweden since 2012, will further stimulate constant cargo flow demand between Latvia and Sweden. The Latvian transit industry and public institutions actively offer transport connection and port capacity for transit of Ukrainian agricultural goods. In October 2023, the first railway cargo of Ukrainian rapeseed entered the port of Riga and reached the global grain markets in transit. Experts and officials from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Transport actively address the idea of the Baltic Corridor at EU level to render it more operational, including requests for additional funds with a view to expanding of railway infrastructure or other subsidy mechanisms to enable full functioning of the corridor.

In various international formats, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has purposefully promoted the supply of Latvian exporting companies, especially those providing high added value, technology and other rapidly growing sectors (IT, communications, bio-economy, smart technologies, pharmacy, optical technologies and products), which ensure significant revenues from Latvian export. In the context of the current geopolitical situation, support for the Latvian defence industry has a particular role to play; therefore, the Foreign Service is looking for opportunities to be involved in procurement procedures organised by the armed forces of other countries, to promote co-operation with players in the defence industry of partner countries, to be included in the system of common supply chains, while maintaining manufacturing in Latvia. Traditional sectors in Latvia (timber industry, food processing, agricultural products) still hold top positions in export volumes and revenues in absolute numbers, therefore the Foreign Service invests considerable resources to support them.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has organised thematic seminars for Latvian companies on entering external markets (Australia, the projects for Ukraine's reconstruction and development). In September 2023, Latvia's economic attachés visited Daugavpils and Rēzekne as part of their annual event at which the diplomatic service presents its capabilities and businesses receives help concerning external markets. As part of the visit, meetings were organised with more than 70 businesses in the region to establish contacts and identify potential export opportunities of those companies in the respective national markets. Investment projects were also identified in Latgale, which needs to attract foreign investments.

# Protection of interests of Latvian nationals, public involvement in formation and implementation of foreign policy, use of the diaspora potential



The interest of the Latvian and international public, including the media, think-tanks, researchers, in foreign and security policy developments in the Baltic region remains significant. Both civil society organisations and Latvian people individually continue to provide comprehensive support to Ukraine; they cooperate and maintain contacts with the Foreign Service on a regular basis. The Latvian Ministry of Foreign Affairs highly values this cooperation.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs continues to communicate proactively on all issues relevant to foreign policy through cooperation with the media, through social media, direct contacts and participation in international events and information campaigns, as well as by organizing them.

The Ministry sees a greater use of diaspora potential as an essential element for the representation of Latvia's foreign political interests, especially as regards support for the development of Latvia's national economy and protection of Latvia's interests in the diaspora's host countries. Central and local government institutions involved in remigration policy should focus on its more effective implementation.

## Public outreach and involvement in foreign policy

**Russia's invasion of Ukraine and other global crises have increased public interest in the foreign policy and security issues. The Latvian Foreign Service ensured closer ties and co-operation with civil society, the media, business people, members of the academic community and creative circles in order to ensure exchange of information, support, involvement in the formation and implementation of foreign policy.**

The Latvian Foreign Service's public communication in 2023 highlighted the efforts made by Latvia and the Allies towards security and safeguarding international legal order, the condemnation of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, support for sanctions against Russia and Belarus, Russia's accountability for the crime of aggression against Ukraine, support for Ukraine's Euro-Atlantic integration, the course of Ukraine and Moldova towards EU membership, as well as support for Finland and Sweden's membership of NATO. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has called on Latvian society and the international community to preserve momentum in providing assistance to Ukraine, while stressing that aid and support, as well as unity with Ukraine, strengthen it in its fight against an aggressor state, Russia.

The Foreign Service and Latvia's civil society organisations continue asserting themselves as donors in development cooperation projects in the Eastern Partnership countries of the EU, Central Asia and Africa. The Ministry, in cooperation with its partners, has promoted visibility of those investments among Latvian society and internationally. In public communication it has also been explained how Latvia contributes to the implementation of the objectives of UNSC Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security.

A special campaign was dedicated to promoting the inclusion of the Old Town of Kuldīga in the UNESCO World Heritage List. UNESCO's decision of 2023 is an important international recognition for Latvia as a whole. Targeted work over a period of more than twenty years was invested in the preparation of this nomination; it therefore is an important contribution to fostering Latvia's international image and promoting tourism.

Of the high-level organised events in 2023, the spotlight should be put on the 14th Annual Forum of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region "Safe and Sustainable Baltic Sea Region for Future Generations" and public diplomacy events held under the Latvian Presidency of the Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers. The main thematic strands of the measures were the preservation of cultural heritage, the implementation of good governance at the municipal level, the role of young people in democratisation processes and the fight against disinformation, support for strengthening Ukraine's justice system, the role of judgments of the European Court of Human Rights, the right to a fair trial in anti-doping cases, freedom of expression and the security of journalists in the digital age, a secure financial ecosystem, and a human rights-based approach to mental health care. The organisation of events took place in close partnership with line ministries, the Financial Intelligence Unit, the Ombudsman's Office, the Saeima, the State Chancellery, as well as the Supreme Court, the Latvian Anti-Doping Bureau, the Latvian Association of Local and Regional Governments, the University of Latvia, the National Heritage Board, the Constitutional Court and the non-governmental sector.

The Foreign Service also continued cooperation with communicators in NATO, the EU and OECD on priority topics for those organisations, as well as the Strategic Communications Coordination Department at the State Chancellery on information space monitoring, monitoring and combating efforts to slander or provide misleading information about Latvia.

In 2023, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs continued to implement its public diplomacy programme abroad in support of the UNSC lobby campaign and promotion of Latvia's visibility. The programme focuses mainly on building contacts with countries in Africa, Latin America, the Caribbean and Oceania as well as representatives from these countries in international organisations. With financial support from the programme, Latvian diplomatic missions in 23 countries have organised 55 public events abroad: seminars, conferences, roundtable discussions, receptions for the official launch of the campaign and thematic events on such UN topics as women's empowerment, development cooperation and climate action, Latvia's experience in the arms export control system, media freedom, cyberspace security, investigations into war crimes in Ukraine related to the return of the deported children, as well as Russia's accountability for international crimes in Ukraine, and resilience to disinformation. In cooperation with UNESCO and the Baltic Centre for Media Excellence in Tunisia, a seminar was organised for journalists and media workers from North African countries on the issues of media development and media literacy. In co-operation with Latvian NGOs, the Embassies of Latvia have gained a profile in the implementation of projects on women's empowerment, including digital issues. Events in India, Egypt, Italy and the Czech Republic have been organised in cooperation with Riga TechGirls.

## Public participation

**The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has been maintaining regular dialogue with non-governmental organisations, social partners, think-tanks and academic researchers. Information exchange and engaging with partners in various projects has been oriented toward regional and global security issues as well as the EU's current priorities.**

A regular exchange of views is held with representatives of the non-governmental sector prior to European Council meetings, as well as in developing Latvia's national positions. Permanent partners of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in this field include the Latvian Association of Local and Regional Governments, the Employers' Confederation of Latvia, the Free Trade Union Confederation of Latvia, Civic Alliance – Latvia, and the Providus think-tank. In April and October, in cooperation with the European Parliament Liaison Office in Latvia, the European Commission Representation in Latvia and the European Movement in Latvia association, the Ministry organised an EU Information Providers Day and a Forum for EU information contacts from central and local authorities, heads of EU Information Points, and representatives from Europe Direct Information Centres, as well as members of the media and non-governmental organisations. In cooperation with the Latvian Association of Political Scientists, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs continued the publication of the magazine titled "Latvia's Interests in the European Union", in which expert opinions on EU issues are provided by EU policy researchers and experts. The topics highlighted in 2023 covered disinformation, digitalisation, digital participation, strategic autonomy, energy and migration, as well as NATO transformation and Ukraine's EU membership.

In order to raise awareness among young people about the specific nature of the work of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the diplomat's profession, the Ministry participated in the Job Shadow Day 2023 project in cooperation with Junior Achievement Latvia. The Ministry was also represented for the third time on the Museum Night. The event drew a wide interest with more than 1,000 participants visiting the Ministry.

In 2023, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs also organised the annual Riga Conference in cooperation with the Latvian Ministry of Defence and the Latvian Transatlantic Organisation (LATO), attracting high-level international participants. With support from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Latvian Institute of International Affairs prepared the annual publication of the Yearbook of Latvia's Foreign Policy and Security Policy. Latvian diplomats and representatives from other organisations participated regularly in international events in Latvia and abroad, actively co-operated with the media, research-and-history related and civil society organisations in their events, asserting Latvia's opinion. The Foreign Service and Embassies actively supported and communicated events organised and supported under cultural diplomacy and by creative industries, historical themes, export promotion, representation of business and economic interests.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs continued organising visits to the regions of Latvia for the ambassadors accredited to Latvia; the Latvian historians and diplomats travelled to the regions for discussions on topics of high current interest.

To mark the twentieth anniversary of Latvia's accession to the EU and NATO in 2024, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in co-operation with NATO's public diplomacy division, Latvian think-tanks, non-governmental partners and entrepreneurs, intends to organize events in order to evaluate what has been accomplished over twenty years, highlight the benefits of membership in those organisations, and discuss future goals and tasks.

## Consular work and consular assistance

**In 2023, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in partnership with other institutions, continued its work to ensure more effective access to consular services for Latvian nationals abroad. The scale of consular services provided by diplomatic missions kept increasing. Nearly 130,000 paid consular services were provided in 2022, while more than 200,000 were provided in 2023.**

Demand for identity documents, passports and identity cards, remained high. If around 30,000 identity documents were drawn up with the help of diplomatic missions in 2022, their numbers rose to exceed 60,000 by 2023. In 2023, diplomatic missions in countries with large Latvian communities organised 35 trips with mobile passport workstations in order to provide more convenient access to IDs for Latvian nationals.

Being aware of the situation with the availability of labour force in Latvia, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in cooperation with the Ministries of Economy, of the Interior and of Welfare, sought solutions in the matter of employment of foreign nationals. Efforts were made to optimise the entry process for foreign labour while also increasing employers' responsibility. Due to high interest in foreign labour on the part of employers, the number of long-stay visas issued at diplomatic missions increased significantly in 2023, making up around 40% of the total number of visa requests processed. 12,373 visas related to employment were issued in 2022, while 9,500 visas were issued in 2023.

Around 34,600 visa applications were processed at diplomatic missions in 2023, or by 1% less than in 2022, when around 35,000 visa applications were received at diplomatic missions. The decrease is due to restrictions on the entry of Russian citizens into Latvia. The missions collected EUR 6 million in state fees and consular revenues for consular services provided in 2023, an increase of EUR 0.5 million compared to 2022.

In 2023, the consular service faced challenges in managing a number of crises, providing practical and informational support to Latvian nationals during earthquakes in Turkey and Morocco, fires in Greece, Spain, and Turkey. Following the attack by the Hamas terrorist group on Israel and the raised threat level, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in cooperation with the national airline airBaltic, organised a special flight on the Riga–Tel Aviv–Riga route in October 2023, helping 148 persons to return to Latvia.

In 2023, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs continued not only to provide consular assistance, but also to carry out preventive work by providing information to the public about the principles of safe travel. As in the previous year, in the summer and winter of 2023, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs organised the annual Travel Safely, Travel Sensibly information campaign. During the campaign, themed visuals were distributed to the digital media with recommendations for travellers, and video of the campaign put out at the Riga Airport, the Riga International Coach Terminal and elsewhere. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in close cooperation with the Ministry of Interior, the "Shelter Safe House" society and Marta Resource Centre for Women, organised the annual public awareness campaign to draw people's attention to the issues of trafficking in human beings.

In order to increase the readiness of the consular service for faster and more efficient handling of crisis situations, work on the development of a new Consular Register was concluded in 2023, and this will allow travellers to record their travel data more easily and help consular officials to address crisis situations more efficiently and promptly. The new Consular Register is scheduled to be available to travellers and consular officials in early 2024. In 2024, the development of access

to electronic services will continue, so that compatriots abroad have more possibilities to receive services provided by Latvian authorities quickly and easily.

## Links with the diaspora

**In accordance with the Diaspora Law, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs continued to ensure a coordinated implementation of diaspora policy by maintaining a system of measures for working with the diaspora. Key priorities identified were: maintenance of the Latvian language and Latvian identity, networking, youth engagement and more active involvement of the diaspora in the national economy of Latvia, as well as promotion of remigration.**

In 2023, the implementation of the policy planning document on the diaspora – the Action Plan for Work with the Diaspora for 2021–2023 – was completed. In the first half of 2024, an evaluation of delivery on the tasks set out in this plan will be carried out, which is essential for continuing to provide support to the diaspora and adapting the selected mechanisms for achieving the objectives of the Diaspora Law.

A total annual budget of EUR 3 million has been assigned to the authorities involved in the implementation of the diaspora policy divided into four lines of action:

- ❖ strengthening the Latvian identity and sense of belonging to Latvia among the diaspora, preservation of the Latvian language and culture outside Latvia;
- ❖ supporting the civic and political participation of the diaspora;
- ❖ involvement of the diaspora in the development of the Latvian economy and science;
- ❖ support for remigration.

Financing for work with the diaspora allocated in the budget of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs amounts to EUR 226,000 and is channelled into projects, research promotion measures and economic cooperation.

The year 2023 was marked by a series of major forums focused on engaging the diaspora in investment attraction, export development and innovation. One of the most visible was the World Latvian Economics and Innovations Forum (WLEIF), which celebrated 10 years since diaspora businesses from around the world first gathered in Riga. The purpose of the forum organised by the World Association of Free Latvians and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is to build long-term contacts and cooperation between business people in the diaspora and in Latvia. Since 2013, the WLEIF has evolved into a significant and unique platform for discussion. In 2023, the WLEIF gathered around 500 participants from 25 countries around the world who, together with senior officials of central and local governments, participated in discussions on sectors important for the economic development of Latvia, including biomedicine, medical technologies, pharmaceuticals, green technologies, smart energy, transport and mobility, labour force and remigration. Such targeted networking, demonstration of investment potential and strategic discussions on national policies and reforms progress are oriented towards future investments to strengthen Latvia's economy.

Cooperation with the diaspora in the field of science in 2023 has also been strengthened at one of the largest scientific events in Latvia – the World Congress of Latvian Scientists, which takes place

every five years. One of the central objectives of the congress is to develop and strengthen contacts of Latvian scientists with scientists of Latvian origin from different countries, therefore Latvian scientists working both in Latvia and around the world were among the visitors and authors of the content of the congress. Informative materials have been developed within the framework of the congress: "The 5th World Congress of Latvian Scientists. Research Latvia. State of the Art" and "Research Latvia: An Overview of Research in Latvia and Results Achieved". Policy recommendations have also been prepared, which are summarised in a publication titled "5th World Congress of Latvian Scientists 'Research Latvia'. White Paper. Policy Recommendations". The 5th World Congress of Latvian Scientists brought together more than 1300 participants.

In order to strengthen informal cooperation between professionals working in Latvia and for international organisations, as well as to discuss Latvia's development and foreign policy priorities, the second Forum of Latvian Professionals Working in International Organisations hosted by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs took place in Riga in July 2023. It brought together, for the second consecutive year, more than 80 Latvian experts from at least 20 countries, and regional and international organisations such as the UN, the OECD, the World Health Organisation, the European Parliament, the European Commission, and the Council of the EU. Cooperation with Latvian professionals working for international organisations facilitates implementation of the priorities of Latvia's foreign policy: international recognition of Latvia and ensuring international rule of law, including in the context of Latvia's candidacy for a seat on UNSC. In 2024, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is planning to enhance that cooperation in order to make the most of the international representation and capabilities of compatriots in the interests of Latvia.

In 2023, intensive work continued by the Diaspora Advisory Council, whose efforts has made it possible to maintain a clear picture of the current needs of the diaspora and a sufficiently strong relationship between diaspora organisations and Latvia. For the diaspora policy to achieve the set objectives, three thematic expert working groups are successfully operating under the Diaspora Advisory Council: the Latvian Language and Education Task Force, the Remigration Coordination Task Force, and the Diaspora Media Task Force. In 2023, the latter task force worked on strengthening the role of the diaspora media in consolidating the community of Latvians who live outside Latvia and maintain informational links with Latvia, informing them about current developments in the diaspora's host countries, in Latvia and around the world. In 2023, the working group made a significant contribution to the launch of the forum titled "Diaspora – an (in)Alienable Part of Latvia's Information Space?" organised by the Latvieši.com portal and the World Association of Free Latvians. The forum addressed, for example, the ways to improve cooperation so that Latvia and the Latvian diaspora would live in a shared information space.

Last year, the Diaspora Advisory Council was actively involved in generating new initiatives and developing concrete proposals important for the diaspora. This contribution of ideas is reflected in the next action plan for work with the diaspora in 2024–2026. The plan takes forward the initiatives included in the current plan for working with the diaspora for 2021–2023, which the institutions, NGOs and diaspora organisations involved in evaluating the implementation of the previous plan have rated as successful. According to the Diaspora Law, these will be maintenance of the Latvian language and identity, networking, youth engagement, and a more active involvement of the diaspora in the national economy of Latvia, as well as promotion of remigration. At the same time, the plan also includes new initiatives and tasks, which are determined by the dynamic development of the diaspora and global challenges – especially in the field of remigration, including measures to support remigration in all planning regions, as well as a programme to promote business activity among remigrants.

In 2023, diaspora organisations have shown great interest in calls for projects launched by the Foreign Service. The Ministry received project applications from 185 diaspora organisations in 23 countries, of those, 111 projects in 21 countries were supported under the available funding, for the total amount of EUR 161,339.82. Traditionally, the countries hosting the largest Latvian communities yield the largest number of projects applied for and approved: 37 project applications were received from the UK, of which 25 were supported, 19 were received from Norway, of which 11 were supported, 16 were received from Australia, of which ten were supported, and 13 were received from Ireland, of which ten were supported.

In pursuit of responsible and research-based policies in the field of the diaspora, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs continued close cooperation in 2023 with the Centre for Diaspora and Migration Studies at the University of Latvia, which developed two pieces of research: "Capacity and Needs of Diaspora Organizations" and "Diaspora Media".



Ministry of  
Foreign Affairs  
Republic of Latvia