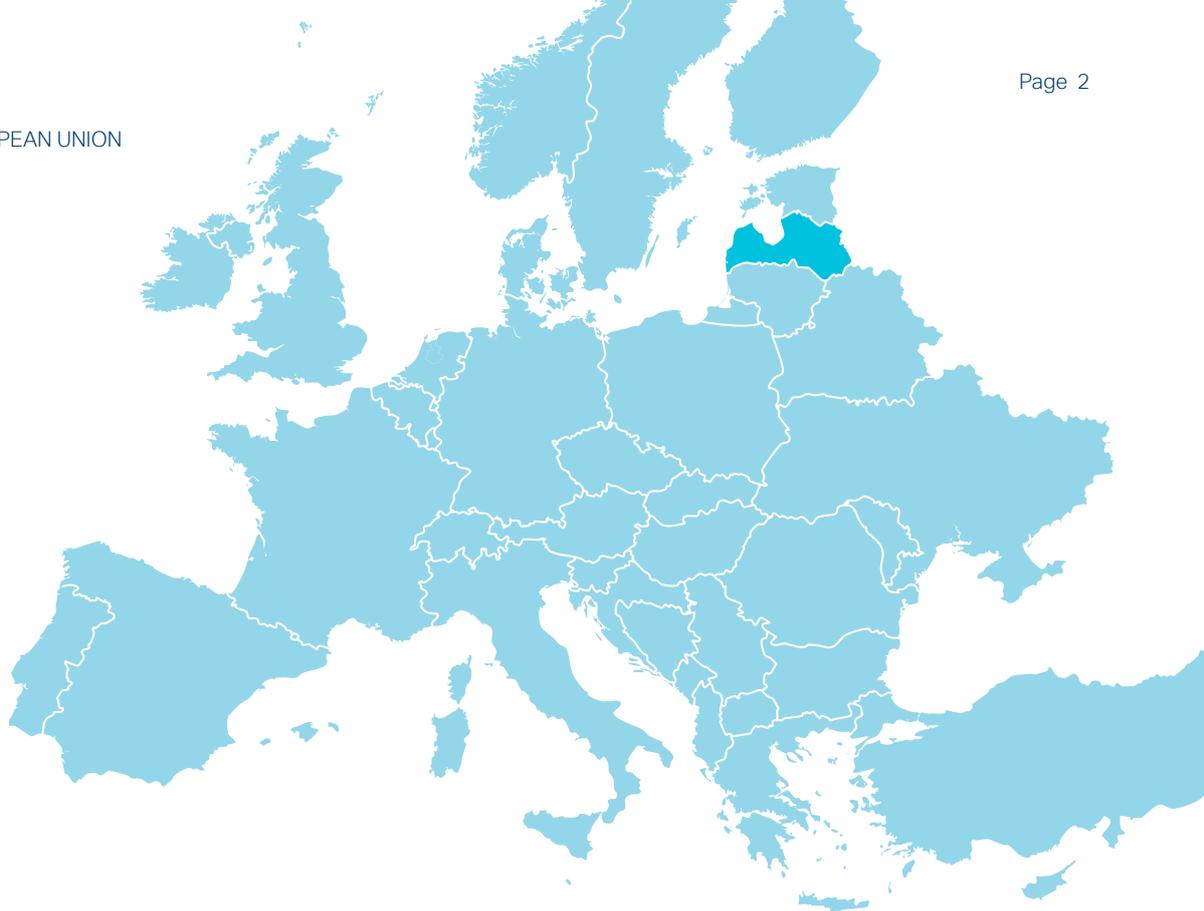


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# LATVIAN PRESIDENCY OF THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION





## GENERAL INFORMATION

Situated in the Baltic region of Northern Europe, Latvia is the central country of the three Baltic states Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. The country regained its independence from the Soviet Union in 1991 and joined the European Union in 2004. Since 2007, Latvia is a member of the Schengen Area and in 2014 the Euro was introduced as the national currency. The population of Latvia is ethnically 59 per cent Latvian and 29 per cent Russian and totals around two million. The state is a democratic parliamentary republic with the legislative power resting in the hands of the single chamber Saeima, which is elected every four years. The President of Latvia, who appoints the Prime Minister, is elected by the Saeima in a separate election. The current Prime Minister is Laimdota Straujuma and the current President is Andris Bērziņš.

## ECONOMY

Between 2008 and 2010, Latvia was affected by serious economic turmoil. After joining the European Union in 2004, Latvia was in good economic shape with broad-based growth driven by productivity and exports. However, after a period of credit-based speculation and inflated real estate values, the economy took a sharp downturn in 2008. As lending froze at international level, due to the world financial crisis and the second largest national bank collapsed, consumption and exports crashed. While the recession did not even last two years, the GDP fell by 25 per cent from peak-to-trough. In 2008 and 2009, Latvia's economic performance was below expectations. Yet, since 2010, there has been a change for the better. Due to substantial spending cuts and inner devaluation, as well as to the financial assistance provided by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the European Union, Latvia reached a growth rate of more than 5 per cent in 2011.

Manufacturing and tourism even reached expansion rates of around 15 and 25 per cent respectively in the first half of 2011. Despite global economic uncertainties, Latvian industrial production, retail sales and exports grew at a fast pace. In its first Post-Programme Monitoring Discussion with Latvia, the IMF announced that Latvia's economy has strongly grown since 2010 and is expected to further expand. The unemployment rate dropped from over 20 per cent in 2010 to 11 per cent in 2014 and is expected to fall below 10 per cent by 2016. The macroeconomic forecast of the European Union expects a GDP growth between around 2.5 per cent in 2014 and 3.5 per cent in 2016. The major industries in Latvia are synthetic fibres, agricultural machinery, timber and textiles. Key exports of the Latvian economy are, among others, minerals, wood products and machinery.



# PRIORITIES

## COMPETITIVE EUROPE

The first priority of the Latvian Presidency will be to strengthen EU competitiveness and to create jobs, as key factors to ensure economic growth in Europe. The Latvian Presidency will work closely with the European Commission in order to facilitate and foster investments in Europe. Further, it will engage in a constructive discussion with the Member States and the European Parliament in order to agree on the legal acts needed to put into practice the Commission's Investment Plan into practice. The Presidency will encourage measures and policy initiatives to strengthen the Single Market, deepen the Economic and Monetary Union (EMU) and advance the Energy Union. It will also work towards the implementation of the European Semester.

## DIGITAL EUROPE

As a second priority, the Latvian Presidency will focus on the proposal for a Digital Single Market, expected by mid-2015, as well as on the data protection package and telecoms package. The Presidency will work on initiatives aimed at creating a truly integrated market such as the removal of barriers to cross-border online trade and a more coherent data protection framework. The goal of these initiatives is to achieve a balance between high quality services, a competitive framework and a reasonable cost for consumers while at the same time protecting consumer and privacy rights online. Further, the Presidency aims at addressing easier and faster access to public administration as well as the use of open processes.

## ENGAGE EUROPE

The third priority of the Latvian Presidency will be to strengthen the role of the European Union on the global stage. It will focus on the conflicts in the Ukraine, Syria and Libya, all of which have direct security implications for the EU, while also recognising the importance of the southern neighbourhood. Other important elements of the programme include the ongoing enlargement negotiations and the opening of new chapters, the external dimension of the trade policy and the implementation of policies in the field of migration. The central event around the third priority of the Latvian Presidency will be the Eastern Partnership Summit, which will take place in Riga in May 2015. The summit should signal a long lasting commitment towards the region.



# WHO IS WHO

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INFORMATION,  
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PICTURES:



ANDRIS  
**BĒRZIŅŠ**  
*President of the  
Republic of Latvia*



LAIMDOTA  
**STRAUJUMA**  
*Prime Minister*



EDGARS  
**RINKĒVIČS**  
*Minister for Foreign  
Affairs*



JĀNIS  
**REIRS**  
*Minister for  
Finance*



RAIMONDS  
**VĒJONIS**  
*Minister for  
Defence*



DACE  
**MELBĀRDE**  
*Minister for Culture*



ANRIJS  
**MATĪSS**  
*Minister for Transport*



DANA  
**REIZNIECE-OZOLA**  
*Minister for Economics*



## >> WHO IS WHO



**RIHARDS  
KOZLOVSKIS**  
*Minister for Interior*



**MĀRĪTE  
SEILE**  
*Minister for Education  
and Science*



**GUNTIS  
BELĒVIČS**  
*Minister for Health*



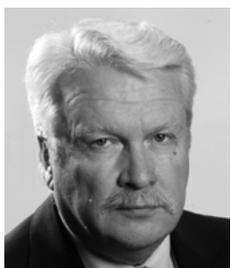
**ULDIS  
AUGULIS**  
*Minister for Welfare*



**DZINTARS  
RASNAČS**  
*Minister for  
Justice*



**KASPARS  
GERHARDS**  
*Minister for Environmental  
Protection and Regional  
Development*



**JĀNIS  
DŪKLAVS**  
*Minister for  
Agriculture*

REPRESENTATIVE



**ILZE  
JUHANŠONE**  
*Perm. Rep. EU*



# POLICY FIELDS

## JUSTICE AND HOME AFFAIRS

In the area of justice and home affairs, the Latvian Presidency will work intensively with the European Commission and the European Parliament on the following priorities: the reinforcement of the data protection framework at EU level, the enhancement of European Union financial interests, the strengthening of procedural rights in criminal proceedings and the further development of the justice for growth agenda. Furthermore, migration flows and the development of a renewed European Union Internal Security Strategy will feature prominently on the Presidency's agenda. Finally, the Latvian Presidency will focus on the fight against international terrorism and the control of the flow of foreign fighters.

## ENERGY

During the first quarter of 2015, the Latvian Presidency will organise a high-level ministerial meeting to discuss the main principles of the Energy Union. The work programme will focus subsequently on the implementation of the European Energy Security Strategy, the completion of the Internal Energy Market and the assessment of the benefits of

strengthened regional cooperation (Energy Community and the Energy Charter). With regard to infrastructure, the Presidency will focus on the need to end Member State's isolation from European networks by 2015, on the 10 per cent interconnection target for 2020 and on the second list of Projects of Common Interest (PCIs). It will also continue the efforts to develop a sustainable energy policy.

## EXTERNAL POLICIES

The most important event within this field will be the 4<sup>th</sup> Eastern Partnership Summit that the Latvian Presidency will host in Riga on 21-22 May. The summit will focus on the strengthening of energy security, the promotion of common educational programmes and youth projects and the accession to EU membership. As concrete objectives, Latvia will explore the possibilities to expand the visa-free travel area to Moldova and Belarus and to increase the involvement of civil society in the partnership. Furthermore, the Presidency will promote a common EU position on the post-2015 Development Agenda and will contribute to the preparations of the next summit with the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States to be held in June 2015.

## TRANSPORT

In the field of transport, the Latvian Presidency intends to focus on the conclusion of the inter-institutional negotiations on the technical pillar of the 4<sup>th</sup> Railway Package and on the finalisation of the procedures to adopt the directive on the cross-border exchange of information on road safety related to traffic offenses. With regard to air transport, it will work on the proposal concerning the minimum rights for airline passengers. Regarding maritime transport, it will advance the ports regulation. The Presidency will also highlight the importance of the TEN-T network for growth and jobs in Europe and will host a ministerial discussion focused on the development, deployment and financing of the TEN-T transport infrastructure.

## CULTURE AND SPORT

The Agenda of the Latvian Presidency in the cultural field will focus on establishing a cross-sectorial cooperation between the cultural and the creative sector. In this regard, it will continue the work of the Italian Presidency on a possible review of the Audiovisual Media Services directive. Furthermore, the Presidency intends to re-evaluate the role of



## >> POLICY FIELDS

culture in the context of the mid-term review of the Europe 2020 strategy. In the field of sport, the work programme of the EU Presidency will focus on the contribution of grassroots sports to young people's employment, as well as on healthy lifestyles and anti-doping issues. Further, it intends to make progress on the ratification of the Council of Europe Convention on the Manipulation of Sports Competitions.

### EDUCATION AND YOUTH

The Latvian Presidency aims at making further advances on the recognition of skills and diplomas at European level. Furthermore, it will contribute to the mid-term review of the strategic framework for education and training (ET2020), whose third implementation phase starts in 2015, as well as to the preparation of the 2015 joint report to strengthen the links between the Europe 2020 strategy and ET2020. The Presidency will also prepare the Council's work for the Bologna ministerial conference to be held in Yerevan (Armenia) in May. In the field of youth, the main priorities for the coming semester will be the implementation of the EU Work Plan for Youth and the contribution of youth policies to Europe 2020.

### ENVIRONMENT

In the environmental field, the Latvian Presidency will focus its efforts on two on-going legislative dossiers: the directive on medium combustion plants and the decision on market stability reserve. Concerning the draft directive on the limitation of emissions from medium combustion plants, the Council's general approach from 17 December 2014 will serve as a basis for the negotiations with the Parliament. The Parliament's Environment Committee is expected to vote on the proposal in April 2015. Other items in the programme of the Presidency include the review of the 2020 strategy and the 2015 Annual Growth Survey. Moreover, the Presidency will work on the international chemicals and waste conventions.

### AGRICULTURE, FORESTRY AND FISHERIES

In the field of agriculture and forestry, the Latvian Presidency will focus on the improvement of the EU food sector's competitiveness and on the importance of sustainable and responsible forest management. Concretely, the Presidency will advance the work on the regulation on production and labelling of organic

products and the aid scheme for the supply of fruit and vegetables in educational establishments. Further, it intends to make progress on the Animal and Health Package. Last but not least, the Presidency will accentuate the importance of a responsible and sustainable resource management within the EU multiannual fisheries management plans and will work towards the conclusion of partnership agreements with third countries.

### HEALTH

The Latvian Presidency will work towards reaching an agreement on medical and in-vitro diagnostic devices. The aim of the new rules is to improve product quality and patient safety and to avoid new obstacles to innovation. Furthermore, the Presidency will advance the Council's work on regulations tackling problems related to alcohol addiction and new psychoactive substances used as alternatives to illicit drugs. Another priority of the Latvian Presidency will be the promotion of a healthier lifestyle, especially among children and young people. The work will be focused on the improvement of eating habits in schools and the promotion of physical activity. Further, Latvia will host the eHealth week, focused on patient-oriented healthcare in May.



## >> POLICY FIELDS

### TRADE AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

The Latvian Presidency will contribute to the ongoing multilateral WTO negotiations, including accession talks. It will also work together with the Commission in order to advance negotiations on the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership. Moreover, it will seek the consent of the Parliament to conclude the CETA agreement and progress the trade agreements with Japan and Ecuador. Concerning sustainable development, the Latvian Presidency will

work to forge a EU common position in the intergovernmental negotiations on the development goals within the new post-2015 development agenda. It will foster a common approach including the economic, social and environmental aspects of development as well as human rights, rule of law and gender equality.

### EMPLOYMENT

One of the main priorities of the Latvian Presidency will be the promotion of employment and the facilitation of labour mobility within

the European Union. Within this field, the Latvian Presidency will focus on inclusive and sustainable participation in the labour market, long-term unemployment and the condition of disabled persons. Moreover, it will foster the dialogue with social partners (business and trade unions). Latvia will also lead the Council's work on important dossiers such as the horizontal equality directive, the Youth Guarantee Scheme and the Youth Employment Directive. The Presidency will also tackle gender equality, particularly the differences in pensions for women and men and the underlying causes of this issue.

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## FURTHER INFORMATION

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[Berzins and Schulz analyze security situation in Europe](#)

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[EU Commission and Latvian government agree on intense cooperation to achieve presidency's priorities](#)

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**European  
Movement**  
Germany

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For a detailed overview of all relevant meetings during the Presidency you can check out the very good [European Movement Germany Calendar](#) (provisional version) of the Latvian Presidency of the Council of the European Union.

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