



# Weekly Briefing

**Latvia external relations briefing:  
Summary of Latvian foreign policy in 2020**  
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# **Summary of Latvian foreign policy in 2020**

## **Introduction**

*Latvia's foreign policy priorities in 2020 were mainly aimed at overcoming the COVID-19 crisis. Challenges faced by Latvia in its external relations have been reinforced by coronavirus outbreak in the world. It means, Latvian foreign policy makers worked especially hard to set and reach foreign policy goals for 2020. Pandemic brought a special focus on external cooperation and importance of multilateralism and importance of transatlantic partnership for Latvia and Baltic states, as well as raised discussions about challenges of globalization processes. The summary of most remarkable foreign policy events and priorities in 2020 is presented below.*

## **Tackling consequences of the Covid-19 crisis**

External relations of Latvia in 2020 were aimed at addressing of COVID-19 negative consequences. During March 2020 and April 2020 Latvia has been actively working to ensure the repatriation flights to Latvia. To overcome the ongoing pandemic crisis the Cabinet of Ministers approved the solidarity of Latvia by contributing to the budget of the United Nations Office for Covid-19 by that expressing unity with other countries who have been deeply affected socially and economically and whose capacity and resources to combat the crisis are limited. In first half of the year, Latvia's management of the Covid-19 crisis outbreak has been among the best in Europe, and Latvia has showed relatively successful epidemiological results. Government action combined with solid work on behalf of the institutions of the interior and health sectors have led to a well-managed crisis response. However, the second wave currently is providing new challenges.

## **Fighting misinformation and disinformation related to COVID-19**

One more challenge in external relations faced by Latvian foreign policy in 2020 is misinformation and disinformation related to COVID-19. Quoting the UN Secretary General,

“as COVID-19 spreads, a tsunami of misinformation, hate, scapegoating and scare-mongering has been unleashed”<sup>1</sup> which poses the serious security threat.

The Latvian Foreign Ministry’s Special Envoy on Information Security singled out three main strengths of Latvia in addressing COVID-19 information issues: 1) the critical role of the Latvian media as a trusted source of information and a platform for open public debate; 2) the efforts to conduct well-coordinated, extensive and straightforward communication relying on trusted public health experts; 3) the critical mindset and awareness of disinformation in Latvian society. Ministry of Foreign Affairs also emphasized the importance of promoting media freedom and strengthening media literacy to better prepare for a possible future crisis through analyzing lessons of Covid-19 pandemic.

### **Latvia’s voice on the global arena sounds louder during pandemic**

In 2020 Latvia was also taking the lead in important discussions/events and global political discourse helping to shape political agenda. In April 2020, Latvia stimulated the development process the United Nations Intergovernmental Conclusions and Recommendations on Financing Development, which were adopted unanimously in New York.

Additionally, under the leadership of Latvian representative, 1) the first online discussion in the history of the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations was held since with the outbreak of pandemic transportation services are limited<sup>2</sup>; 2) the United Nations came to a common approach to finance the prevention activities of Covid-19, 3) and to an agreement for additional support to the poorest.

This year Latvia also has initiated a Cross-Regional Statement on “Infodemic” in the Context of COVID-19<sup>3</sup> issued within the UN system, to tackle the issue of disinformation related to COVID-19. The statement was supported by 130 UN Member States and two UN observers. As a follow-up to this statement, Latvia together with Australia, France, India and Indonesia organized a side event “Responding to the “Infodemic” – Sharing Best Practice” on the eve of the United Nations General Assembly’s special session on COVID-19.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.mfa.gov.lv/en/news/latest-news/66117-cross-regional-statement-on-infodemic-in-the-context-of-covid-19>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.mfa.gov.lv/aktualitates/zinas/65936-latvijas-vadiba-ano-vienojas-par-kopigu-pieejumu-attistibas-finansesanai-covid-19-krize>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.mfa.gov.lv/en/news/latest-news/66117-cross-regional-statement-on-infodemic-in-the-context-of-covid-19>

## **Broader representation in the international organizations**

Broader representation in the international organizations is a prerequisite for the implementation of interests of Latvia's foreign policy. As a result, in 2020 Latvia has submitted its candidatures for the following seats and posts at international organisations<sup>4</sup>:

- Latvia has presented its candidature to the non-permanent seat of the UN Security Council for the term 2026-2027 at the elections in 2025;
- Latvia has presented the candidacy of Dr. Martins Pāparinskis for election to the International Law Commission for the term 2023-2027 at the elections in 2021.

## **International cooperation strengthened to overcome Covid-19**

As Latvia is a relatively small economy the external cooperation between Baltic countries and European Union has been crucial for the recovery after economic and social consequences caused by the Covid-19 crisis.

In April 2020 Minister of Foreign Affairs of Latvia together with the Foreign Ministers of other Baltic and Nordic countries discussed the need to cooperate on a regional scale to combat the consequences of the Covid-19 crisis. To ensure the safety of Nordic and Baltic countries' citizens the Foreign Ministers of those countries have assessed co-operation to provide repatriation flights or other transit opportunities. In all, the overall priority for Nordic and Baltic countries is the regional cooperation and the reduction activities of Covid-19 crisis.

It was vital for Latvia to strengthen multilateralism through cooperation in international organisations and bodies such as the World Health Organisation and the United Nations Human Rights Council. This is of special importance now as the world is fighting the threats posed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

## **Latvia keeps encouraging transatlantic partnership and unity**

The crisis triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the importance of the transatlantic partnership. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Latvia pointed out that regardless of changes in the United States administration, the European Union and the United States of America should continue working closely together. Transatlantic unity is key in framing a

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.mfa.gov.lv/en/policy/international-organizations/latvia-at-the-united-nations/candidatures-of-latvia>

common policy in relation to Russia and China. Like-minded countries must be united and consistent on matters related to our shared values and security in its broader sense<sup>5</sup>.

During 2020 the Latvian Foreign Minister expressed in particular, that Canada is an important strategic partner to Latvia and the EU. Latvia encourages cooperation between Canada and Latvia, and also EU to Cooperation of the EU and Canada and joint acting can demonstrate to the rest of the world that democratic societies can recover from the pandemic in the most effective way and return most rapidly to economic growth.

### **International relations with China and participation in CIIE 2020**

In past 30 years there has been a steady growth in bilateral trade and cultural exchanges between Latvia and China. Though key export from Latvia are commercial products like wood, peat and frozen blueberries, Chinese consumers are increasingly interested also in skin care and food products from Latvia. Most commonly found Latvian food and beverages are healthy breakfast cereals, fish cans, alcoholic beverages and baby food. Latvia recently has also started exporting beef to China.

At the 3<sup>rd</sup> China International Import Expo (CIIE 2020) Latvia shared both its usual import products presented in Latvian Import Pavilion in Greenland Global Commodity Trading Hub, and innovation industrial products such as “invisible glass” by Latvian company Groglass and mineral paint by the Riga Varnish and Paint Factory (RILAK). It is expected that future participation in the CIIE exhibition will bring new opportunities for Latvian business and industry.

### **Support to democratic society in Belarus**

The presidential elections in Belarus have been one of the foreign policy issues in 2020. Latvia, together with other EU Member States has expressed its solidarity and fully supports the deep desire of Belarusian people to live in an independent, free and democratic Belarus. According to Ministry of Defence and Ministry of Interior, Latvia was prepared to accept political asylum seekers from Belarus. However, Latvia has not received requests for political asylum from Belarusian citizens. Latvian Government has also agreed to strengthen Belarusian

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.mfa.gov.lv/en/news/latest-news/67189-representatives-from-the-baltic-and-nordic-countries-and-the-united-states-of-america-underline-the-significance-of-transatlantic-unity>

civil society by allocating €150,000. It was said that one of the directions is the provision of legal aid to those in administrative or criminal proceedings, as well as to support the media.

## **Summary**

In 2020 most of the foreign policy events and activities have been made in context of the outbreak of Coronavirus. The Latvian Foreign Ministry dedicated its information security activities to clarifying misinformation and disinformation related to Covid-19 promoting media freedom.

In 2020 Latvia was also taking the lead in important discussions/events and global political discourse helping to shape political agenda. To have the opportunity to influence the global agenda furthermore too, Latvia has been reinforcing its representation in international organizations. In 2020 Latvia has presented its candidature to the non-permanent seat of the UN Security Council for the term 2026-2027 and has presented their representative candidacy for election to the International Law Commission.

During this year Latvia has spent significant efforts on strengthening cooperation with its existing partners: the other two Baltic states, Nordic countries, EU and China. Latvia also underlined the need for transatlantic unity and continued cooperation between the USA, Canada and Europe on security policy and building defense capabilities. The relations with another strategic cooperation partner of Latvia – China, were strengthened too, in particular through participation in 3<sup>rd</sup> China International Import Expo in Shanghai.

Among other important foreign policy issues for Latvia was the support and solidarity towards Belarus after its presidential elections this year.

## References:

[1] <https://www.mfa.gov.lv/en/news/latest-news/66117-cross-regional-statement-on-infodemic-in-the-context-of-covid-19>

[2] <https://www.mfa.gov.lv/aktualitates/zinas/65936-latvijas-vadiba-ano-vienojas-par-kopigu-pieejumu-attistibas-finansesanai-covid-19-krize>

[3] <https://www.mfa.gov.lv/en/news/latest-news/66117-cross-regional-statement-on-infodemic-in-the-context-of-covid-19>

[4] <https://www.mfa.gov.lv/en/policy/international-organizations/latvia-at-the-united-nations/candidatures-of-latvia>

[5] <https://www.mfa.gov.lv/en/news/latest-news/67189-representatives-from-the-baltic-and-nordic-countries-and-the-united-states-of-america-underline-the-significance-of-transatlantic-unity>