



## **Weekly Briefing**

**Latvia external relations briefing:**  
**Latvian foreign policy prospects and relations with EU, US, China in**  
**2021**  
**Nina Linde**



# **Latvian foreign policy prospects and relations with EU, US, China in 2021**

## **Introduction**

*Pandemic crisis has highlighted challenges of a new level both to individual countries and international organizations, and to the principle of multilateralism in general. In 2021 it is expected that already existing global challenges like globalization process, rivalry between the great powers, populism, and doubts on effectiveness of international organizations, will rise. Under such circumstances, cooperation and synergy in all possible formats and at all levels is vital to reach Latvia's policy goals. In 2021, Latvian foreign relations will evolve around the four largest power centers – the European Union, the United States of America, China, and Russia, and try to resolve topical issues like Covid-19 crisis and facilitate long-term foreign policy priorities.*

## **Impact of COVID-19 on multilateralism and increased interest in international organizations**

Strengthening multilateralism is one of the primary interests of Latvia's foreign policy. The COVID-19 crisis has revealed the potential and opportunities for the multilateral system and international organisations in addressing the consequences of the pandemic. At the same time, the crisis has proved that global organisations such as the United Nations and the World Health Organisation (WHO) must undertake reforms to boost their effectiveness [1]. Despite some challenges imposed by recent crisis, Latvia believes in multilateral order and the goal for 2021 year is to increase country's participation in international organizations. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs will steer and coordinate Latvia's preparations for elections to a seat of a non-permanent member of the United Nations Security Council for the term of 2026–2027. A major step in the implementation of Latvia's foreign policy interests and raising the country's profile internationally is Latvia's election to the UN Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, also known as "UN Women", from 2021 to 2025.

## **Continued fight with disinformation and the development outlook of economic relations**

One of the main issues in present-day international relations is the struggle for values and influence in a digital world. With its efforts and work in the European Union, the United Nations and other formats, Latvia has become known as one of the countries in the world actively seeking solutions to the spread of disinformation and other challenges in the digital environment on the basis of open society values such as freedom of speech and of the internet. This year Latvia continues to tackle and refute disinformation spread by Russia and draw the attention of the international community to the problem. In 2021 Latvia also stands up for closer cooperation between the European Union, NATO and other international partners both at the practical level and in safeguarding our common international values and principles.

On a priority basis, economic relations of Latvia are and will be built with partner countries in the European Union, the OECD and other external partners like China. The Foreign Economic Policy Coordination Council approved the profile of a preferred foreign investor and set the main criteria for investors – 1) based in a member state of the European Union, NATO or the OECD, 2) a sound financial position, 3) no risks identified in current activity. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Embassies in association with Latvian Investment and Development Agency intend to organize this year targeted seminars to attract investors.

## **Participation of Latvia in NATO 2030 process**

Addressing the COVID-19 crisis has imparted additional significance to cooperation between the EU and NATO, especially coordination on the matters of disinformation and strategic communication. In view of the increasing relevance of new technologies and artificial intelligence and challenges they pose, it is expected that cooperation between the European Union and NATO could also be enhanced in that area in 2021. In NATO 2030 process, special attention will be paid to the strengthening of the Allies' political unity and the consultation process, while stressing the need to ensure that the Alliance stays strong militarily. [2]

The meeting of NATO Ministers of Foreign Affairs to be held in Riga in March 2021 will contribute significantly to the Allies' consultation process. This will be the first meeting following the inauguration of the United States President at which the United States Secretary of State will meet other Allies in the NATO format. By organizing this meeting, Latvia will provide a contribution both to the strengthening of the transatlantic link and raising awareness

among the Allies on security challenges in our region and the need to further reinforce collective defense measures.

### **Transatlantic cooperation will focus on 5G security**

The United States of America is Latvia's strategic ally. Latvia has always cooperated successfully with both Republican and Democratic Presidents and Administrations. In 2021 Latvia will seek close cooperation with the newly-elected United States President and his Administration to jointly pursue strategic goals and reinforce the transatlantic relations between the EU and the United States. Latvia plan strengthen the ties with the U.S. Congress with a view to a broad and permanent political support for the strategic partnership with the United States of America.

As Latvian Ministry of Foreign Affairs points out, "in 2021, we shall strengthen the relationship with the new U.S. administration to promote the bilateral political dialogue and the U.S. economic presence in Latvia" [3]. Latvia plans to work on a visit at the highest level in 2022, when Latvia and the United States will mark 100 years since the establishment of diplomatic relations, notably, to promote United States investment in Latvia and contacts between businesses.

Also, cooperation between United States and Latvia will be built around 5G security issues. The joint declaration on 5G security has strengthened bilateral relations between Latvia and the United States and created additional opportunities for cooperation with Latvian companies related to 5G networks. Work on the 5G security declaration and implementation of the European Union toolbox on 5G cybersecurity will continue at the national level in 2021.

### **Relations between the European Union and China will develop around trade and climate change**

The relationship between the European Union and the People's Republic of China is full of challenges and remaining one of strategic importance. Latvia as well as the European Union in their dialogue with China, maintain the need and argue for full adherence to norms internationally recognised by the UN and WTO regarding international law, human rights, the rule of law, and international trade.

While firmly backing its values and interests, Latvia considers it appropriate to strengthen the European Union's dialogue with China in dealing with global challenges such as climate change and international stability. China's announcement of September 2020 on its commitment to achieve carbon neutrality by 2060 demonstrates that the country is prepared for a more constructive approach on climate goals. The European Union as well continues on its course to becoming a climate-neutral union of countries by 2050, and reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by at least 55% by 2030 compared to 1990, surpassing the current ambition of at least 40%. The current task of the competent ministries in Latvia is to actively follow the European Union's climate policy. Latvia will continue emphasizing that transition to climate neutrality should be as inclusive as possible and fair both within the European Union and concerning other countries worldwide. The EU's Green Deal initiatives are expected in a number of fields in the coming years. Therefore, here lies a big potential for cooperation of both countries.

Latvia's relations with China are being built bilaterally and in the framework of the European Union-China cooperation, in the 17+1 forum of cooperation between the Eastern and Central European countries and China, as well as international organisations in the United Nations system. Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Latvia voiced a position, that the relations can be characterised as pragmatic, seeking possibilities for cooperation where it is mutually beneficial. [4] The "17+1" cooperation should serve the practical interests and needs of partner countries rather than being a platform for broader strategic ambition.

## **Summary**

The COVID-19 crisis confirmed that multilateral diplomacy is a vital element in global cooperation, especially in the field of health care. Therefore, the strengthening of multilateralism and improving the effectiveness of international organisations, so as to ensure predictable functioning of the international environment based on respect for international law, have a place of paramount importance in Latvia's foreign policy.

Also, Latvia will continue to advocate close and mutually complementary cooperation between the European Union and NATO. In the time when the world has been shaken by the COVID-19 pandemic, NATO retains its role of the safeguard of Euro-Atlantic security and stability. The NATO 2030 process was launched to ensure the Alliance's ability in the next decade to decisively address both current and future challenges.

Another Latvia's priority is to strengthen the resilience of the European Union and transatlantic partners against disinformation and foreign influence operations, including the ability to identify, analyse and counter disinformation campaigns and targeted influence operations.

The external relations with Latvia existing partners will be maintained – transatlantic cooperation with U.S. will be continued also with new administration with special focus on 5G security this year. The Latvian-Chinese relations can be characterized as pragmatic, seeking possibilities for cooperation where it is mutually beneficial and will be strengthened in terms of trade and investment, as well as with new focus on climate change and carbon-neutral economy in 2021 and upcoming years.

### **References:**

[1] Annual Report of the Minister of Foreign Affairs on the accomplishments and further work with respect to national foreign policy and the European Union (2020):

[https://www.mfa.gov.lv/images/ministrija/Annual\\_Report\\_of\\_the\\_Minister\\_of\\_Foreign\\_Affairs-2020.pdf](https://www.mfa.gov.lv/images/ministrija/Annual_Report_of_the_Minister_of_Foreign_Affairs-2020.pdf)

[2] <https://www.mfa.gov.lv/en/news/latest-news/67397-annual-report-of-the-minister-of-foreign-affairs-on-the-accomplishments-and-further-work-with-respect-to-national-foreign-policy-and-the-european-union-2020>

[3] Website of Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Latvia: [www.mfa.gov.lv](http://www.mfa.gov.lv)

[4] Annual Report of the Minister of Foreign Affairs on the accomplishments and further work with respect to national foreign policy and the European Union (2020)