



Weekly Briefing

Latvia external relations briefing:

Latvia in the Geopolitical Conditions of 2022: Support for Ukraine

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Latvia in the Geopolitical Conditions of 2022: Support for Ukraine

Summary

The military aggression against Ukraine carried out by the establishment of the Russian Federation is a serious violation of international law, which has radically changed the security situation in the region and more broadly in Europe. Russia's aggression against Ukraine has radically changed the bilateral relations between Latvia and Russia. Most of the bilateral relations have either been suspended or reduced to the minimum necessary level. On the other hand, the support for Ukraine by Latvia is one of the highest, looking at the gross domestic products of countries supplying aid to Ukraine, and it is growing more and more to ensure Ukraine's victory in the war and the defence of a democratic Europe. Latvia's national position in response to Russia's war crimes in Ukraine has been firm, condemning and leading, inspiring Western countries to take similar steps. For a long time, Europe did not listen to Latvia's warnings about Russia, which proved to be true after the invasion of Ukraine. Now Latvia's further steps, experience and leadership will be decisive in future decisions of the European Union.

Introduction

Since February 24, 2022, the military aggression against Ukraine by the Russian Federation has radically changed the security situation around the world. Russia has unjustifiably caused the largest military conflict and humanitarian disaster on the European continent since the end of World War II. The range of issues to be discussed in global politics is based on the ongoing war in Ukraine and the security situation not only on North Atlantic Treaty Organisation's (NATO) eastern border, but also in the world. To stand for a just world, Latvia has established a firm position to protect the democratic world and support Ukraine with all possible measures, while simultaneously pointing out Russia's war crimes, which resonate in world politics and the actions of other countries.

Relations with Russia

In response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Latvia has taken a series of decisions at the national level to narrow bilateral cooperation with Russia to the minimum necessary level. At the time of the escalation of hostilities, in the spring of 2022, the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Parliament of Latvia evaluated the bilateral agreements concluded by the Republic of Latvia and the Russian Federation. The Commission decided to suspend 12 bilateral agreements or their individual articles and denounce one agreement.

The government also decided to terminate or denounce agreements in areas such as economic cooperation, culture and cross-border travel. The regular political consultation mechanism of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was frozen, as well as cooperation within the framework of the Intergovernmental Commission was suspended. The Russian Consulates General in Daugavpils and Liepaja were closed, as well as the Consulate General of Latvia in St. Petersburg, the Consulate in Pskov and the Chancellery of the Consular Department of the Latvian Embassy in Moscow in Kaliningrad. On the other hand, the Latvian Embassy in Russia and the Russian Embassy in Latvia continue their work.

In Latvia, the list of unwanted persons has been expanded, as well as the rebroadcast of all Russian TV channels in Latvia and propaganda websites have been closed. In addition, on August 11, 2022, in a statement, the Parliament recognized Russia's violence against the civilians of Ukraine and other countries as terrorism and Russia as a state supporting terrorism. Since February 24, when Russia's aggression against Ukraine began, Latvia has had one of the strictest approaches among European Union (EU) countries, even limiting the issuance of visas to Russian citizens. The adapted approach has resonated in global politics and has led other countries to adapt similar measures to strengthen national security and support Ukraine.

Support to Ukraine

Since the first days of the conflict, the Latvian government and society have pledged to support Ukraine and its people in wartime conditions. In Latvia, on March 3, 2022, the Law on the support of Ukrainian civilians was adopted at a matter of urgency, which has been fundamental to provide support to Ukrainian citizens and their family members as quickly as possible and without unnecessary bureaucracy, who leave Ukraine or who cannot return to

Ukraine due to the war. In October 2022, the number of Ukrainian refugees in Latvia reached 41,000.

Latvian delegations also visit war-affected Ukraine. In May 2022, the Speaker of the Latvian Parliament, Inara Murniece, visited Ukraine and expressed solidarity with the Ukrainian people. On October 26, 2022, Inara Murniece received the state award of Ukraine - the Order of Prince Yaroslav the Wise - for significant personal merits in strengthening international cooperation, supporting state sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine, significant contribution to the popularization of the Ukrainian state in the world.

Latvian President Egils Levits, who has visited Ukraine twice during the war, has also shown solidarity with Ukraine. The Latvian president visited Ukraine for the first time on April 13, becoming one of the first Western leaders to visit the capital of Ukraine during the war. In September 2022, President Levits became the first Western statesman to spend the night in Kyiv during the war.

During the visit in September, Latvian President Levits, after talks with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy, issued a call to start negotiations on Ukraine's admission to the European Union. Also, the President of Latvia took part in the unveiling ceremony of plaques dedicated to several Western leaders, including himself, in Kyiv. The names of political leaders and other representatives of Ukraine's partner countries, who provide Ukraine with important support in the fight against Russia, are immortalized in the alley.

In general, in 2022, Latvia has been in first place in the world in terms of the government's support to Ukraine, as a percentage of the country's GDP (gross domestic product). Until October 3, 2022, Latvia had directed 0.9% of bilateral aid from GDP to Ukraine, ahead of Poland and Estonia, whose support was 0.5% and 0.4%, respectively. Similarly, Latvian society and the non-governmental sector have donated a total of around 9 million euros to the defence needs of Ukraine. Politicians and government leaders have stated a clear position - Latvia will support Ukraine in this war until its end and after that with all the capabilities it has.

Latvia's Stance Resonates Globally

For too long, Europe did not listen to Latvia's warnings about Russia, that relations with it may turn out to be "a huge challenge that will lead to a collapse at one point" - this was acknowledged by the President of the European Parliament (EP), Roberta Metsola, during her

visit to Latvia in October 2022, expressing her gratitude to Latvia for its leadership in the new geopolitical situation. The centre of gravity in understanding of Russia's war in Ukraine is on the side of Latvia and its neighbouring countries, therefore Latvia sets prime examples to Europe.

When Russia invaded Ukraine on February 24 of this year, Europe had to admit that Latvia was right about Russia. The President of the EP claimed that Latvia is a leading country in holding Russia accountable and had gone a step further by recognizing Russia as a country that supports terrorism.

The president of the EP expressed that Latvia is a symbol of hope, change and resilience for her; proof that people can overcome difficulties, resist and break out of the shackles of history by joining the European Union (EU) and building a common future with European values which reside in Latvian residents.

Conclusions

Since February 2022, Latvia's position has been firm and pragmatic, and it has also influenced other Western countries to follow the example set by Latvia. By making the decision to include Russia in the list of countries that support terrorism, by introducing sanctions and closing the borders to Russian citizens, Latvia undertakes to influence the bilateral cooperation agreements with Russia and creates the "Iron Curtain" of the 21st century. As a NATO border country with Russia, Latvia protects democracy in Europe by providing maximum support to Ukraine, which is also a priority for the entire European Union, choosing the path of development - life in democracy. Only the complete and final victory of Ukraine and the complete defeat of Russia is the guarantee of lasting peace in Europe. Moreover, Latvia is very aware of what Ukraine is dealing with and what Europe will be dealing with to overcome threats to democratic values, prosperity, peace and justice. In the new geopolitical era, countries must think about how to further support Ukraine - promoting its reconstruction and punishing Russia for its war crimes. Latvia's experience and leadership will be decisive in the next steps that the EU will have to take to overcome the threats posed by Russia and Vladimir Putin. With its strong stance and the impact, it has made on the politics of Western countries, Latvia will continue to strengthen its democratic and justice-based position in global politics, becoming an increasingly important ally of democracies in the world and a greater opponent of authoritarianism.

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