



Weekly Briefing

**Latvia external relations briefing:
Latvian Delegations Participate in UN General Assembly Events in
United States**

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Summary

In September 2023, the 78th session of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA 78) took place in New York, focusing on "Rebuilding trust and reigniting global solidarity" towards the 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals. The prominent Latvian delegation, led by President Rinkevics, actively participated in various events, including the U.S.-Baltic Investment Summit, Climate Ambition Summit, and discussions on peace and security in Ukraine. President Rinkevics also met with global leaders, including U.S. President Joe Biden and UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres. In his UNGA speech, Rinkevics emphasized the need for UN Security Council reforms and condemned Russia's actions in Ukraine, highlighting the global implications of Russia's aggression. Furthermore, Latvia showcased its commitment to sustainable development during the UN SDG Action Weekend, with the Institute of Economics of the Latvian Academy of Sciences presenting the EQUALS-EU project, promoting gender-inclusive innovation, as well as best practices in development of economic activity in rural areas. The visits of delegations reinforced Latvia's dedication to a rules-based international system and its role as a proactive global actor.

Introduction

In September 2023, the world's leaders converged in New York for the 78th session of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA 78), a pivotal forum where all 193 UN Member States discuss pressing international issues. This year's General Debate, spanning from September 19th to 26th, was themed "Rebuilding trust and reigniting global solidarity: Accelerating action on the 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals towards peace, prosperity, progress, and sustainability for all." Amidst this backdrop, a high-level Latvian delegation, led by President Rinkevics, embarked on a series of significant engagements. From addressing the Assembly to fostering bilateral relations and championing sustainable development, Latvia's proactive role in this global gathering underscores its commitment to a rules-based international order. This article delves into the intricacies of Latvia's participation,

highlighting its diplomatic endeavors, President Rinkevics's poignant speech, and the nation's researchers' strides in driving innovation through capacity building.

I The Proposal

From September 16th to 23rd, a high-level Latvian delegation, led by President Rinkevics, visited the United States to participate in various significant events.

During his visit to New York, President Rinkevics attended the opening of the 78th session of the UN General Assembly and participated in the U.S.-Baltic Investment Summit, the Sustainable Development Leaders Dialogue on Science, Technology, and Innovation, the Climate Ambition Summit, and the UN Security Council's open debates on peace and security in Ukraine. He also took part in a summit addressing the existential threats posed by rising sea levels. The President also attended a reception hosted by U.S. President Joe Biden and First Lady Jill Biden.

A meeting between the Baltic states' presidents and UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres was scheduled during the General Assembly. Additionally, the Latvian President met with Polish President Andrzej Duda and held bilateral meetings with leaders from Andorra, South Africa, Liechtenstein, Moldova, Rwanda, and Tuvalu. Topics discussed included bilateral relations, cooperation in international organizations, support for Ukraine, and promoting Latvia's candidacy for a non-permanent seat on the UN Security Council for 2026-2027.

On September 21st and 22nd, President Rinkevics attended the "Spotlight Latvia" conference in Boston, organized by the Latvian-American Chamber of Commerce. During this time, he met with Massachusetts Governor Maura Healey. Furthermore, President Rinkevics had meetings with Latvians residing in both New York and Boston, strengthening ties with the diaspora, and promoting Latvia's interests and cultural heritage.

II President's Speech at the General Assembly

In a compelling address to the UN General Assembly on 20 September 2023, Latvian President Rinkevics underscored the urgent need for reforms in the UN Security Council and demanded accountability from Russia for its war crimes in Ukraine.

Rinkevics's speech was primarily centered on the Russian war against Ukraine. He stressed that this conflict not only threatens global peace but also tests the multilateral system based on rules. The president highlighted the blatant violation of the UN's core principles by Russia, particularly the principle of refraining from the use of force against the sovereignty and territorial integrity of any state. Such a violation, especially by a nuclear-armed nation and a permanent member of the UN Security Council, undermines the entire international system.

The Latvian leader criticized the international community for its inaction during Russia's aggression against Georgia in 2008 and the illegal annexation of Crimea in 2014. Such complacency, he argued, emboldened Russia's imperial ambitions. Rinkevics emphasized that Ukraine's identity is distinct from Russia's, urging the international community to stand firmly against Russia's assault on international law and norms.

He also highlighted the atrocities committed by Russia, including deliberate attacks on civilians and infrastructure in Ukraine. With over 11 million people displaced, the president drew attention to the forced deportations and illegal adoptions of Ukrainian children to Russia.

Rinkevics praised the efforts of the International Criminal Court in investigating heinous crimes in Ukraine but pointed out its limitations in addressing the crime of aggression against Ukraine. He reiterated Latvia's call for the establishment of a special international tribunal under the UN's auspices to ensure the strongest international legitimacy.

The president also touched upon the global ramifications of Russia's actions, particularly in the realm of food security. By blocking Ukraine's exports and devastating its agricultural sector, Russia has disrupted grain supplies worldwide. Rinkevics debunked Russia's claim of concern for global food security, stating that it is Russia's invasion, not sanctions, that has caused shortages in food and fertilizers.

Rinkevics's call for meaningful reforms in the UN Security Council resonated with many. He criticized the misuse of veto rights, which often paralyzes the council, emphasizing that these rights were meant to be a responsibility, not a privilege.

The president also expressed Latvia's support for a more equitable representation in the Security Council, including for African nations and Small Island Developing States. He reminded the assembly of Latvia's candidacy for the Security Council elections in 2025.

Towards the end of his address, Rinkevics touched upon other global challenges, including sustainable development goals and climate change. He acknowledged the unique challenges faced by Small Island Developing States due to climate change and affirmed Latvia's commitment to strengthening resilience.

III Best Practices of Driving Innovation Through Capacity Building

On 16 September 2023, during the UN Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) Action Weekend at the headquarters in New York City, the Institute of Economics of the Latvian Academy of Sciences, in collaboration with the Permanent Mission of the Republic of Latvia to the UN and the A. Meneghetti Humanistic and Scientific Research Foundation, hosted a high-level side event “International Best Practices For Sustainable And Inclusive Rural Evolution Through Innovations In Higher Education, Science, And Gender Equality”. The side event was moderated by Dr. Nina Linde, the Director of the Institute of Economics of the Latvian Academy of Sciences (IE LAS), who also presented challenges and best practices in developing economic activity in rural areas.

To maximise the SDG Summit’s impact, the UN Secretary-General, H.E. Antonio Guterres, convened an SDG Action Weekend from 16-17 September 2023, which generated opportunities for stakeholders, UN entities, and Member States to convene inside the United Nations Headquarters and set out specific commitments and contributions to drive SDG transformation between now and 2030. The first day - SDG Mobilisation Day - was opened at the General Assembly by the UN Secretary-General himself.

The President of the Meneghetti Humanistic and Scientific Research Foundation, Pamela Bernabei, shared the “Hortus Lizori” project as a best practice model for sustainable development of rural villages, cultural heritage preservation and community revitalization.

Head of the Council of the IE LAS, professor Baiba Rivza presented University research of knowledge-based economy in rural areas of Latvia and development scenarios.

Renars Raubiskis, Project Manager at the IE LAS presented the research project “EQUALS-EU: Europe’s Regional Partnership for Gender Equality in the Digital Age” as a

best example of building capacity in inclusive innovation in Europe and beyond. This initiative funded by the European Union's Horizon 2020 Framework Programme and implemented as part of the EQUALS Global Partnership helps eliminate gender divides and empowers minorities as digital leaders.

High-level guests of the session included Chang Wook-Jin, Chief of the UN NGO Branch, H.E. Daniel Del Valle Blanco, Ambassador and Permanent Observer of the International Youth Organisation for Ibero-America to the United Nations, Hanifa Mezoui, New-York Permanent Representative of AICESIS, Dr. Solomon Darwin, Executive Director at the Garwood Center for Corporate Innovation of the University of California-Berkeley, Barbara Winston, President and Founder of Peace Innovative Initiative - New York, Emilie McGlone, Peace Boat US Director, Tatsuya Yoshioka, Founder of Peace Boat, among others.

Conclusions

The visit of the high-level Latvian delegation to the U.S. underscores Latvia's proactive stance in international diplomacy and its commitment to a rules-based global order. By addressing critical issues like Russia's aggression towards Ukraine and global sustainable development, Latvia positions itself as a responsible and engaged global actor. The bilateral meetings and interactions with the diaspora not only strengthen Latvia's ties with major global players and its own expatriate community but also bolster its candidacy for significant roles in international organizations. Such engagements enhance Latvia's visibility, influence, and partnerships on the global stage, vital for its national interests and strategic objectives.

President Rinkevics's speech was a clarion call for collective action, accountability, and reforms. His emphasis on the principles of international law and the need for a rules-based multilateral system was a reminder of the challenges and responsibilities that lie ahead for the global community. The UN SDG Action Weekend of 2023, particularly the side event spearheaded by the Institute of Economics of the Latvian Academy of Sciences, underscored the indispensable role of research and intersectoral cooperation in advancing the Sustainable Development Goals. For Latvia, hosting such a pivotal event not only reaffirmed its commitment to the SDGs but also showcased its leadership in fostering international collaborations for a sustainable future.

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