



**Kateryna Zarembo
Elizabete Vizgunova**

FOREIGN POLICY AUDIT:

A large, dark blue graphic element consisting of a semi-circle on the right side and a rounded rectangle on the left side, containing the text "UKRAINE-LATVIA".

**UKRAINE-
LATVIA**

DISCUSSION PAPER

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Administration of the President of Ukraine,
Verkhovna Rada,
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Authors:

Kateryna Zarembo,
Elizabete Vizgunova

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1. INTRODUCTION

Relations between Ukraine and Latvia make an interesting and a rare example of bilateral relations. To begin with, Ukraine's relations with Latvia are more cloudless than Ukraine's relations with its immediate neighbors. Despite the lack of physical borders, it is the ephemeral border of history that binds both of these countries together, as almost any Latvian official will tell you. Two particularly significant periods are meant here: surprisingly, the brief cooperation between the governments of Latvia in the form of the Latvian National Council and Ukraine, as the Ukrainian People's Republic, from 1917 to 1920; and the soviet era. Paradoxically, despite the generally negative burden of soviet heritage, the cordial relationship between the two today is widely acknowledged in public and official discourse as a result of this joint past.

Arguably—and in contrast with Ukraine's many neighbors and partners—, Latvia's approach to Ukraine is devoid of paternalism: while Latvia is happy to share lessons of state-building and Euro-Atlantic integration with Ukraine, it is equally willing to learn from Ukraine and, in certain respects, treats it as a mentor. However, Latvian policy-makers see their country's foreign policy as more mature and predictable, which is also seen as a determining factor of success for Latvia's own Euro-Atlantic identity-building. Ukraine's policies, on the other hand, both now and in the past, are not perceived as a guarantee for Europeanization and the further pursuit of reforms. The repeated shifting of priorities experienced during the presidencies of Leonid Kuchma (1994–2004) and Viktor Yanukovich (2010–2014) disrupted linearity in Ukraine's "westernization" and periodically loosened the relationship between the two countries.

As a state fractured by ethnic divisions and the archaic status of non-citizen,¹ Latvia also struggles with finding social consensus, thus offering lessons for some of Ukraine's most contentious issues.

1 *The status of a non-citizen can be granted to a person who lived in Latvia at least 10 years prior to July 1, 1992. More details here: <https://likumi.lv/doc.php?id=77481>*

As with many other countries, Ukraine's relations with Latvia gained additional impetus after the start of Russian aggression, and the number of high level visits and meetings increased after 2014. The presidents of Ukraine and Latvia have met on an annual basis since 2015, when the current Latvian president, Raimonds Vējonis, was elected. Most recently, Premier Volodymyr Groysman visited Riga on March 1, 2018, among other things, to seal the removal of Latvia from Ukraine's list of offshore zones, a much anticipated decision, as the original move to include Latvia in the list was treated with considerable surprise in Riga.² Moreover, contacts have not been limited to the highest level: various national institutions have cooperated, starting with the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and the group of interparliamentary cooperation to the Ministry of Education, the National Anti-Corruption Bureau (NABU), and the Ministry of Defense. After a five-year interval, Verkhovna Rada Speaker, now Andriy Parubiy, visited Riga in December 2015, upholding parliamentary dialog at the highest level. Overall, with 2018 marking the centenary of Ukraine-Latvia diplomatic relations, both countries have an opportunity to reassess their relations in order to acknowledge the lessons of the past and explore new avenues of partnership.

Ukraine's interests in Latvia include:

- supporting Ukraine's European and Euro-Atlantic integration aspirations;
- maintaining sanctions towards Russia and supporting Ukraine against Russia's aggression;
- attracting Latvian investment and joint business projects;
- learning from Latvia's experience in various areas: combating corruption, developing agriculture,

² *Ukrinform.net, "Ukrainian diplomat gets note due to Latvia's inclusion in list of offshore zones," 30/01/2018, <https://www.ukrinform.net/rubric-economy/2392814-ukrainian-diplomat-gets-note-due-to-latvias-inclusion-in-list-of-offshore-zones.html>*

decentralizing, integrating Russian speakers, working with the diaspora, and so on.

Latvia's interests in Ukraine includes:

- encouraging Ukraine's European and Euro-Atlantic integration and implementing the DCFTA with the EU;
- seeing an improved business climate in Ukraine;
- paying due respect to Latvian statehood through, among others, commemorating its shared history with Ukraine.

The present paper looks at the points where Ukrainian and Latvian interests converge and offers recommendations on how to capitalize on them for the mutual benefit of both countries.

2. UKRAINE'S INTEREST IN LATVIA AND LATVIA'S INTEREST IN UKRAINE: POINTS OF INTERSECTION

2.1. RUSSIA'S AGGRESSION IN UKRAINE: IMPACT ON LATVIA'S EURO-ATLANTIC IDENTITY

The reasons for Ukraine's presence in Latvia's foreign policy landscape are multidimensional. In the first place, Latvia unconditionally supports Ukraine's integration into the EU and NATO. For Latvia itself, its membership in Euro-Atlantic and European structures has become almost synonymous with its independence. The "return to Europe" was articulated in the 1995 document *Main directions for Latvia's Foreign Policy through 2005*, where the integration in the EU and Trans-Atlantic security structures was seen as the necessary condition to ensure the irreversibility of Latvia's independence, and so this became the key focus of Latvia's foreign and security policy.³ Latvia's foreign policy, which, alongside that of the other two Baltic states, has received a lot of assistance from Nordic EU member states, is governed by "a certain sense of duty and ethics which could be summarized as 'we have received a lot of help; it is now our turn to do the same'".⁴

A fundamental turn in the bilateral relationship between Latvia and Ukraine was marked by the Orange Revolution of 2004. For Latvia, this meant that Ukraine had finally stepped onto a path of change

³ *Latvijas Republikas Ārlietu ministrija, Latvijas ārpolitikas pamatvirzieni līdz 2005. gadam [Main directions for Latvia's Foreign Policy until 2005]. Available at: <http://www.mfa.gov.lv/arpolitika/latvijas-arpolitikas-pamatvirzieni-lidz-2005-gadam>*

⁴ *Katerina Kesa, "Latvian and Lithuanian Policy in the Eastern Neighborhood: Between Solidarity and Self Promotion," Perspectives, Special Issue on Identity and Solidarity in Foreign Policy: Investigating East Central European Relations with the Eastern Neighborhood, Volume 19, #2, 2011. Available at: https://www.jstor.org/stable/23616146?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents, p. 85.*

that the three Baltic states had started earlier, with their Singing Revolution of 1987-1991.⁵

In the 1990s, Latvia went through many debates that are very familiar to Ukraine today: should we or should we not be neutral?—“Latvia as the little Switzerland”—“Latvia as a bridge between East and West”

Few Ukrainians are aware that, in the 1990s, Latvia went through many debates that are very familiar to Ukraine today: should we or should we not be neutral?—“Latvia as the little Switzerland”—“Latvia as a bridge between East and West”—and so on. But when the country acceded to NATO and the EU, it made a significant break with its soviet legacy. The effectiveness of integration with transatlantic structures, which has been reaffirmed by the current security dynamic in Ukraine, is such that Latvian policy-makers insist that the doors of these organizations remain open to Eastern partners, meaning Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia. It was no coincidence that the fourth Eastern Partnership summit took place in Riga in 2015, even though Riga’s expectations for the admittedly low-key summit were not met. However, international diplomatic efforts have gone further since 2014 and the Russian-Ukrainian conflict and Eastern Partnership policy have been widely-discussed topics at the annual Riga Conference,⁶ with its 2017 edition also hosting the Ukraine’s Foreign Minister.

Russia’s annexation of Crimea in March 2014 sobered attitudes among Latvian policy-makers and Latvians in general, giving additional impetus for this relationship.⁷ Russian aggression towards Ukraine was perceived as an existential threat to Latvia itself, in fear of the worst—that Russia might undertake a similar attack on Latvia,

5 Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia, Address by H. E. Vaira Vike-Freiberga, President of Latvia, at the inauguration of President Viktor Yushchenko, 23/01/2005. Available at: <http://www.mfa.gov.lv/en/news/latest-news/speeches-and-interviews/5523-address-by-h-e-vaira-vike-freiberga-president-of-latvia-at-the-inauguration-ceremony-of-president-viktor-yushchenko-in-kyiv-ukraine-january-23-2005>

6 An annual event through which Riga hopes to become a regional politico-intellectual forum. More details here: <https://www.rigaconference.lv/2017/>

7 Notably, a certain period of “normalization” of Latvian-Russian relations took place in 2000s. Events like the 2007 Agreement on the State Border and the official visit of ex-President Valdis Zatlers to Moscow in 2010 served to change the perception of Latvia’s (in)security.

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whether in a conventional or an asymmetric way. Public outrage over Crimea was evident in opinion polls, as the share of Latvians who perceive Russia as a threat grew from 30-40% to 60% by the end of 2014.⁸ Here, it must be noted that Latvia's threat perception is also shaped by its large population of roughly 223,000⁹ non-citizens, some 55,000 Russian citizens,¹⁰ and Russian speakers living on its territory, who are seen as a possible entry-point for Russia's asymmetric warfare tactics, both in popular discourse and in state security institutions.¹¹

Thus, Latvia's key foreign policy document, the *Annual Report of the Minister of Foreign Affairs*, has had an unequivocal focus on security since 2014, stressing the need for close cooperation with its NATO allies and the promotion of security and stability in the EU neighborhood.¹² The 2016 Latvian Defense Concept, prepared in the aftermath of events in Crimea, affirms that Russia is the primary threat to the current security order of the world, and therefore a direct security threat to Latvia itself. This explains why Latvia has been a consistent supporter of sanctions against Russia and continuously raises concerns over

**Russian aggression towards Ukraine
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threat to Latvia itself**

⁸ Rusif Huseynov, "Latvia: Under constant threat by Russia," 22/06/2017. Available at: <http://thepoliticon.net/slider/370-latvia-under-constant-threat-by-russia.html>

⁹ Centrālā Statistikas Pārvalde, *Latvijā dzīvo 11,4% nepilsoņu [11.4% of non-citizens live in Latvia]*. Available at: <http://www.csb.gov.lv/notikumi/latvija-dzivo-114-nepilsonu-46957.html>

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Latvijas Republikas Drošības policija, Publiskais pārskats par Drošības policijas darbību 2016. gadā [Public overview of the activities of the State Security Police in 2016]*. Available at: dp.gov.lv/lv/?rt=documents&ac=download&id=18

¹² *E.g. Latvijas Republikas Ārlietu Ministrija, Ārlietu ministra ikgadējais ziņojums par paveikto un iecerēto darbību valsts ārpolitikas un Eiropas Savienības jautājumos 2017 gadā [Annual report of the Minister of Foreign Affairs on the accomplishments and planned activities of the state foreign policy and the European Union in 2017]*, 21/12/2017. Available at: <http://www.mfa.gov.lv/aktualitates/zinas/58797-arlietu-ministra-ikgadejais-zinojums-par-paveikto-un-iereto-darbibu-valsts-arpolitika-un-eiropas-savienibas-jautajumos-2017-gada>

the situation in Ukraine, even as international media attention faded, denouncing Russia's breach of the Helsinki Final Act and of Ukraine's territorial integrity and indivisibility,¹³ and brings up the deteriorating human rights situation in Crimea¹⁴ in the UN and the OSCE.¹⁵ Events in Ukraine have been internalized to the extent that they have become a part of Latvia's public diplomacy efforts and, indeed, the definition of Latvian public diplomacy itself¹⁶. For instance, the Latvian MFA website has a separate section dedicated to the security developments in Ukraine and nuances of bilateral cooperation.

These concerns have spilled over to Latvia's actions in multilateral forums, such as the EU and NATO,¹⁷ where Latvia made good use of its presidency in the Council of the EU to shore up the unity of the Baltic states on the continuation of sanctions.¹⁸ Similar efforts have been

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- 13 *Latvijas Valsts Prezidents, Valsts prezidenta Raimonda Vējoņa uzruna Apvienoto Nāciju Organizācijas Ģenerālās asamblejas 72. sesijā Ņujorkā 2017, gada 20. septembrī* [Statement by President Raimonds Vējonis at the 72nd session of the United Nations General Assembly in New York, September 20, 2017]. Available at: https://www.president.lv/storage/items/PDF/2017/20092017-Runa_ANO_GA-Nujorka.pdf
 - 14 *Delfi.lv, "Rinkevičs ANO vērs uzmanību uz Krimas tatāru kritisko cilvēktiesību stāvokli,"* 28/02/2017. Available at: <http://www.delfi.lv/news/national/politics/rinkevics-ano-vers-uzmanibu-uz-krimas-tataru-kritisko-cilvektiesibu-stavokli.d?id=48568435>
 - 15 *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia, EU Statement on the Violation of OSCE Principles and Commitments by the Russian Federation and the Situation in Ukraine, 08/01/2015.* Available at: <http://www.mfa.gov.lv/en/news/developments-in-ukraine/eu-statement-on-the-violation-of-osce-principles-and-commitments-by-the-russian-federation-and-the-situation-in-ukraine>
 - 16 *Latvijas Republikas Aizsardzības ministrija, Publiskā diplomātija* [Public diplomacy]. Available at: http://www.mod.gov.lv/lv/Ministrija/Sab_lidzdaliba/Publ_diplomatija.aspx
 - 17 *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Lithuania, Joint Statement: Prime Ministers' Council of the Baltic Council of Ministers, 18/12/2017.* Available at: https://www.urm.lt/uploads/default/documents/uzienio_politika/Baltijos_taryba/Baltic_PM_Joint_Statement_18_12_2017.pdf
 - 18 *Reuters, "Baltic States to back further Russia sanctions if Ukraine crisis does not ease,"* 21/06/2014. Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-ukraine-crisis-sanctions-baltics/baltic-states-to-back-further-russia-sanctions-if-ukraine-crisis-does-not-ease-idUSKBN0EWOH120140621>

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made through different formats, such as trilaterally, by coordinating a public communiqué of the Chairs of the Baltic States' Parliaments on March 15, 2014¹⁹ and on November 5, 2015, after the visit of then-PM Arseniy Yatseniuk.²⁰ Similar coordinated statements have been channeled through other regional formats, such as the Baltic Council of Ministers or March 2018 statements of the Speakers of Parliaments of Ukraine, Moldova, Poland, Lithuania and Latvia against the construction of "Nord Stream-2" pipeline.²¹ Latvia currently has 7 experts deployed to the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission (SMM) in Ukraine, and three experts to the EU Advisory Mission to Ukraine.²² Individually, the Ministry of Defense has joined select projects, provided financial support within the NATO Trust Fund for Ukraine, alongside other professionalization and educational activities.²³

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- 19 *Latvijas Republikas Saeima, Baltijas valstu parlamentu priekšsēdētājas: starptautiskā sabiedrība piedzīvo nopietnākos pasaules mēroga draudus drošībai kopš Aukstā kara beigām [Speakers of the Baltic Parliaments: The international community is facing the most serious global security threat since the end of the Cold War], 15/03/2014. Available at: <http://www.saeima.lv/lv/aktualitates/tiksanas-un-vizites/1001.rss.rss/21958-baltijas-valstu-parlamentu-priekssedetajas-starptautiska-sabiedriba-piedzivo-nopietnakos-pasaules-me>*
- 20 *Valsts Kanceleja, Kopīgais paziņojums presei pēc Latvijas Ministru prezidentes Laimdotas Straujumas, Igaunijas Ministru prezidenta Tāvi Reivasa, Lietuvas Ministru prezidenta Aļģirda Butkeviča un Ukrainas Ministru prezidenta Arsēnija Jaceņuka tikšanās [Joint press statement following the meeting between Prime Minister of Latvia Laimdota Straujuma, Prime Minister of Estonia Taavi Rõivas, Prime Minister of Lithuania Algirdas Butkevičius and Prime Minister of Ukraine Arseniy Yatseniuk], 05/11/2015. Available at: https://www.mk.gov.lv/sites/default/files/editor/05_pazinojums_presei.pdf*
- 21 *Artjoms Konohovs, "NATO mudina Eiropu saglabāt sankcijas pret Krieviju" [NATO urges Europe to keep sanctions against Russia in place], 07/12/2016. Available at: <http://www.lsm.lv/raksts/zinas/arzemes/nato-mudina-eiropu-saglabat-sankcijas-pret-krieviju.a213558/>*
- 22 *Latvijas Republikas Ārlietu ministrija, Latvija sniegs atbalstu reformu procesa Ukrainā un karadarbībā cietušo ārstniecībai un rehabilitācijai [Latvia will help the treatment and rehabilitation of victims of the war, and support the reform process in Ukraine], 03/05/2016. Available at: <http://www.mfa.gov.lv/aktualitates/zinas/50657-latvija-sniegs-atbalstu-reformu-procesam-ukraina-un-karadarbiba-cietuso-arstniecibai-un-rehabilitacijai>*
- 23 *Sargs.lv, "Latvijas karavīri sāk Ukrainas karavīru apmācību" [Latvian soldiers start training Ukrainian soldiers], 14/03/2016. Available at: http://www.sargs.lv/Zinas/Dienesta_gaita/2016/03/14-01.aspx#lastcomment*

For example, in 2016, Latvia supported Ukraine's defense capabilities through the training of officers at BALTDEFCOL, offering English language courses at educational institutions in Latvia and training for service personnel in a number of military disciplines.

Russia's aggression has not only transformed bilateral relations, which was true for Ukraine's relations with many other partners, but also contributed to the transformation of the self-perception and identity of Latvia. Interlocutors from Latvia say that Russia's aggression and Ukraine's resistance to it has demonstrated that EU and NATO membership of cannot be taken for granted. Surprisingly, the narrative about Ukraine "fighting a war for the EU," which is almost taboo in some EU capitals, is popular among opinion leaders in Latvia. To make good its commitment to the pledge of the 2018 NATO Warsaw Summit, Latvia plans to reach 2% of GDP defense expenditure target,²⁴ while working to achieve state resilience and social cohesion, and to develop self-defense and deterrence capabilities, primarily to meet the needs of NATO's 1,138-strong rotating forces.²⁵

Meanwhile, amendments in Latvia's Immigration Law were introduced, allowing the Cabinet of Ministers the power to limit residence permits to foreigners holding property in Latvia to no longer than five years if the state security is at stake.²⁶ Other

²⁴ *Latvijas Avīze*, "Latvija būs viena no retajām NATO valstīm ar 2% no IKP aizsardzībai", 18/11/2018. Available at: <http://www.la.lv/latvija-bus-viena-no-retajam-nato-valstim-ar-2-no-ikp-aizsardzibai/>

²⁵ Nora Vanaga, "Latvijas drošības politika: veidojot atturēšanas stratēģiju" [*Latvian security policy: Developing a deterrence strategy*], in: *Latvijas Ārējā un Drošības politika. Gadagrāmata 2017*. Latvian Institute of International Affairs, 2017. Available at: <http://www.lai.lv/publikacijas/latvijas-areja-undrosibas-politika-gadagramata-2017-577>, p. 63

²⁶ *Tvnet.lv*, "Saeima atbalsta apjomīgus Imigrācijas likuma grozījumus; vairākus rosinājumus noraida" [*Saeima supports amendments to Immigration Law; several suggestions are rejected*], 17/12/2015. Available at: http://www.tvnet.lv/zinas/latvija/588633-saeima_atbalsta_apjomigus_imigracijas_likuma_grozijumus_vairakus_rosinajumus_noraida

2. Ukraine's interest in Latvia and Latvia's interest in Ukraine: points of intersection

additions to the law made the process costlier and more regulated.²⁷ On February 9, 2018, the Saeima, Latvia's legislature, adopted the Magnitsky Act of Latvia, which prohibits 49 foreigners involved in the Magnitsky case from entering Latvia. Another domestic, and highly controversial, development was a ban on rebroadcasts of Rossiya RTR, a Russian TV channel (Россия-РТР) for six months on the grounds that it was inciting hatred²⁸ and a halt to the online news domain sputniknews.lv – which simply relaunched in a couple of hours, from a foreign domain. On November 23, 2016, the Law on Education was amended, adding that it was the duty of teachers to strengthen the sense of belonging to Latvia and that only a person who was loyal to Latvia and Satversme, the Latvian Constitution, could be the head of an educational institution. Any teachers or heads of educational institutions considered not to be in compliance with this provision was at a potential risk of losing their position. Needless to say, some of the amendments were controversial among the broader public, who saw them as disproportionate and not establishing a comprehensive, holistic approach to increased domestic resilience.

It is precisely for its reliable support that Latvia is a valued partner in the eyes of Ukraine's Foreign Ministry: Ukrainian diplomats reject the small vs big approach to other countries, stating firmly that one country, regardless of its size, means one very valuable voice in European and Euro-Atlantic institutions.

²⁷ *Latvijas Republikas Saeima, Saeima otrreizējā caurlūkošanā pieņem Imigrācijas likuma grozījums par atkārtotu uzturēšanās atļauju ārzemniekiem [Amendments to the Immigration Law regarding the granting of repeated residence permits to foreigners, second reading in the Saeima], 09/06/2016. Available at: <http://saeima.lv/lv/aktualitates/saeimas-zinas/24902-saeima-otrreizeja-caurlukosana-pienem-imigracijas-likuma-grozijumus-par-atkartotu-uzturesanas-atlauj>*

²⁸ *Tvnet.lv, "No šodienas aizliegts retranslēt un izplatīt TV programmu "Rossija RTR"" [From today, the retransmission and the redistribution of the Rossiya RTR TV program will be prohibited], 11/04/2016. Available at: http://www.tvnet.lv/zinas/latvija/603857-no_sodienas_aizliegts_retranslet_un_izplatit_tv_programmu_rossija_rtr*

2.2. DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION: PARTNER TO PARTNER, NOT TEACHER TO PUPIL

Since 2014, Ukraine has become the main beneficiary of Latvia's development cooperation policy, according to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Latvia website. In 2016, more than 40% of bilateral development cooperation funding allocated to the Latvian MFA was invested in Ukraine's security and development.²⁹ In real numbers, Latvia's support for Ukraine's development was around €440,000 in 2016, compared to €520,000 in 2015 and €490,000 in 2014. While these figures are relatively modest, the priority fields are related to Latvia's own experience with transition and, consequently, to the transfer of knowledge it can share, related to instituting good governance, strengthening rule of law, supporting democratization and civic society, fostering regional development and fiscal decentralization, improving education, and strengthening the farm sector and exports.³⁰

Latvia's approach is not that of an overseer but of a peer

Clearly, Latvia's approach is not that of an overseer but of a peer. As Latvian decision-makers put it, "We know from experience how difficult it is to fight bad habits." Besides, Latvia, together with the Baltics, is considered to be one of the best places to share experience, given that the transit routes and other circumstances are so similar. We outline some of the priority areas of development cooperation.

One of the top joint projects between the two countries is territorial reform and municipal cooperation, with Chernihiv Oblast being the pilot project. Since 2014, the Latvian Ministry of Environmental Protection and Regional Development (MEPRD) has been working with Chernihiv Oblast in Ukraine to facilitate the region's territorial

²⁹ *Author interview with Andrejs Pildegovics, State Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Latvia, December 14, 2017.*

³⁰ *Latvijas Republikas Ārlietu ministrija, Īstenotie attīstības sadarbības projekti [Implementation of development co-operation projects], 05/07/2017. Available at: <http://www.mfa.gov.lv/arpolitika/divpusejas-attiecibas/latvijas-un-ukrainas-attiecibas/istenotie-attistibas-sadarbibas-projekti>*

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reform, the move to e-governance and municipal cooperation.³¹ Cooperation in Chernihiv has been so intensive that a Consulate of the Republic of Latvia was established in Chernihiv in 2016. Other oblasts where Latvia is undertaking or planning to undertake projects in agriculture, energy efficiency and eco-friendly technologies are Lviv and Dnipropetrovsk.

Latvia's transition know-how is also translating into official documents, such as Development Cooperation Policy Guidelines of Latvia, which clearly prioritize Ukraine as a top recipient of aid. For instance, beginning with Administrative Territorial Reform in 1998, Latvia has used a blueprint for the preliminary legal and institutional work to set up local government institutions and merge population centers. With an overall objective of advancing decentralization of both power and finances, the activities and projects directed by MEPRD hope to advance local government reform, strengthen the local-central dialog, and promote good governance and sustainable development.³² Some Ukrainian media have assessed Latvian decentralization reform critically,³³ but what's most important is Latvia's readiness to share its experience, offering both best practices and what mistakes to avoid.

The post-soviet heritage of unofficial networks, organized crime and corruption were a crucial impediment to Latvia's foreign policy priorities in the early 2000s. But the conditions set before Latvia prior to accession to NATO and the EU drove crucial changes in Latvia's approach to combating these phenomena, starting with corruption. The Corruption Surveillance and Combating Bureau, established in 2002, has already started to exchange experience with its Ukrainian coun-

³¹ *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Latvia, Projects implemented in the areas of European integration, education, administrative and territorial reform, agriculture, e-governance, and others, 15/02/2016. Available at: <http://www.mfa.gov.lv/en/news/developments-in-ukraine/projects-implemented>*

³² *Īstenotie attīstības sadarbības projekti, opt.cit.*

³³ *Yevropeiska Pravda, "Yak ne varto provodyty adminreformu, abo chy povtoryt Ukraina pomylky Latviyi?" [How the administrative reform should not be done, or Will Ukraine repeat Latvia's mistakes?] 25/05/2015. Available at: <http://www.eurointegration.com.ua/articles/2015/05/25/7034150/>*

terpart, the National Anti-Corruption Bureau of Ukraine or NABU.³⁴ But it is Latvia's training specialists who have become particularly involved in shaping a new generation of civil servants in Ukraine's government and in its non-government sector. Intensive programs aimed at establishing closer links between Latvia and Ukraine, as well as transferring knowledge based on the Latvian experience as a member of the EU, are now being organized on a biannual basis.³⁵ However, the Latvian side is often frustrated by the frequent staff turn-over at the Ukrainian public institutions, which leads to the loss of the institutional memory and experience acquired through lesson-learning. Input in tackling corruption in the judiciary branch is also already being provided by Latvia's Ministry of Justice.³⁶ Latvia is sharing its experience and know-how not only through EU Twinning projects but also by actively taking stock of lower administrative levels—in short, coordinating support at all possible levels.

Based on the similarities of their territorial development, Latvia and Ukraine have successfully developed cooperation in food monitoring, agriculture, fisheries and forestry to advance Ukraine's compliance with European standards in line with the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement. Latvia is willing to provide advisory support for legislative changes to reach EU food-production and agricultural standards, ensure sustainable development in rural areas, food safety monitoring and the training of phytosanitary inspectors in accordance

³⁴ *Korupcijas Novērošanas un Apkarošanas birojs, Ukrainas delegācijas vizīte [Visit of the Ukrainian delegation], 05/008/2016. Available at: https://www.knab.gov.lv/lv/knab/international/aktualitates/7757-ukrainas_delegācijas_vizīte.html*

³⁵ *Rīga Graduate School of Law, New Diploma Program for Eastern Neighborhood, 22/04/2014. Available at: <http://www.rgs.l.edu.lv/en/news/new-diploma-programme-for-eastern-neighborhood>*

³⁶ *Latvijas Republikas Tieslietu ministrija, Latvija piedalās projektā Austākās tiesas efektivitātes paaugstināšanai Ukrainā [Latvia participates in a project to increase the effectiveness of the Supreme Court in Ukraine], 10/2017. Available at: <https://www.tm.gov.lv/lv/aktualitates/tm-informacija-presei/latvija-piedalas-projekta-augstakas-tiesas-efektivitates-paaugstinasanai-ukraina>*

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with EU requirements, as well as joint research³⁷ and environmental protection projects.³⁸

Latvia's ethnic composition is diverse: Just under 40% of its population is ethnic minorities: 26.9% Russians, 3.3% Belarusians, 2.2% Ukrainians, 2.1% Poles and 3.4% of other nationalities.³⁹ Despite an overwhelming number of Russian speakers in Latvia, Russian is treated as a foreign language in law. Starting out with the 1999 Law on Education, also known as the 60/40 law because it required 60% of subjects at minority secondary schools to be taught in Latvian and 40% in the minority languages by 2004, Latvia will finish the transition of all public education to the Latvian language by 2020, giving minority pupils an opportunity to learn their literature, cultural and historical subjects in their mother tongue.⁴⁰ The transition to the state language has been a painful and controversial process, only gradually fading from the domestic and international media limelight. Despite this, the 2000 Law on the State Language was identified as the kind of know-how that Latvia could successfully share with Ukraine, based on the September 29, 2017 Agreement on cooperation in the fields

³⁷ *Latvijas Republikas Zemkopības ministrija, Latvija turpinās dalīties pieredzē ar Ukrainu lauksaimniecības attīstībā un ES standartu ieviešanā [Latvia will continue to share its experience with Ukraine in the development of agriculture and the implementation of EU standards], 26/10/2017. Available at: <https://www.zm.gov.lv/zemkopibas-ministrija/presei/latvija-turpinas-dalities-pieredze-ar-ukrainu-lauksaimniecibas-attisti?id=9087>*

³⁸ *Latvijas Republikas Vides aizsardzības un reģionālās attīstības ministrija, Latvija un Ukraina attīstīs sadarbību vides aizsardzības jomā [Latvia and Ukraine will develop cooperation in the field of environmental protection], 03/04/2017. Available at: http://www.varam.gov.lv/lat/aktual/preses_relizes?doc=24052*

³⁹ *Latvijas Nacionālās aizsardzības akadēmija – Drošības un stratēģiskās pētniecības centrs, opt. cit., p. 4*

⁴⁰ *Latvijas Republikas Izglītības un zinātnes ministrija, Informācija par pāreju uz mācībām valsts valodā vispārīgās izglītības iestādēs, kas īsteno mazākumtautību izglītības programmas [Information on the transition to teaching the state language in general education institutions that implement minority education programs], 23/10/2017. Available at: <http://www.izm.gov.lv/lv/aktualitates/2624-informacija-par-pareju-uz-macibam-valsts-valoda-visparejas-izglitiba-iestades-kas-isteno-mazakumtautibu-izglitiba-programmas>*

of education, science, youth and sport between the two countries.⁴¹ After the Venice Commission published its conclusions on Ukraine's 2017 Law on Education, Education Minister Liliia Hrynevych visited Latvia to study its experience as a possible model for implementing the Commission's recommendations.⁴²

According to the UN, Latvia's population was only 1.95 million in 2016. Large-scale emigration since about 2004, when Latvia joined the EU, has led to an 18.2% decline in population.⁴³ Maintaining contacts with its outside communities, preserving the Latvian identity among Latvians living abroad and providing incentives for them to return are among the priorities of the Foreign Ministry, for which it even has a special unit. Given that there are currently an estimated 12–13 million people of Ukrainian origins living abroad, Latvia and Ukraine can exchange practice in dealing with their immigrant communities and—importantly—engaging them in state-building. Both countries have examples to share, such as Vaira Vīķe-Freiberga in Latvia, Natalie Jaresko and Ulana Suprun in Ukraine. This kind of lesson-learning has not yet been introduced to the bilateral agenda, but Latvia and Ukraine definitely have some valuable experience that they can exchange.

⁴¹ *Latvijas Republikas Izglītības un zinātnes ministrija, Izglītības un zinātnes ministrs Kārlis Šadurskis paraksta Latvijas un Ukrainas starpvaldību līgumu par sadarbību izglītībā* [Minister of Education and Science Kārlis Šadurskis signs Latvian-Ukrainian intergovernmental agreement on cooperation in education], 29/09/2018. Available at: <http://www.izm.gov.lv/lv/aktualitates/2588-izglitibas-un-zinatnes-ministrs-karlis-sadurskis-paraksta-latvijas-un-ukrainas-starpvaldibu-ligumu-par-sadarbibu-izglitiba>

⁴² *Ukrinform, "Rekomendatsii venetsianky mozhut vtilyty za latviiskou modelliu"* [Recommendations of the Venice Commission can be implemented through the Latvian model], 14/12/2017. Available at: <https://www.ukrinform.ua/rubric-society/2364779-rekomendacii-venecianki-mozut-vtiliti-za-latviiskou-modellu-mon.html>

⁴³ *Gordon F. Sander, "Latvia, a Disappearing Nation," 01/05/2018* Available at <https://www.politico.eu/article/latvia-a-disappearing-nation-migration-population-decline/>

2.3. A COMMON PAST AS A BRIDGE BETWEEN TWO COUNTRIES

The average Ukrainian would be surprised to find out that virtually every Latvian politician refers to a common past with Ukraine when speaking about the country. Importantly, it is not only, and not even predominantly, about the period when the two were trapped in the Soviet Union. Ukraine's brief period of independence in 1917-1920 is an episode that political circles in Latvia still remember, not just due to bilateral diplomatic links between their governments—in-exile, but also thanks to the Latvian community in Ukraine, such as Latvian officers in Ukrainian National Republic's army, some 15,000 Latvians living in Kharkiv during World War I, and Latvian-language newspapers published in Kharkiv during this time.

Virtually every Latvian politician refers to a common past with Ukraine when speaking about Ukraine

What is particularly significant here is that the Latvian diaspora and its diplomatic service in exile, despite a de facto Soviet occupation, ensured that the countries now belonging to the Western coalition never recognized the legality of the soviet annexation. Although the three Baltic states were an exception against the rest of the soviet bloc, this episode of history is still brought up to acknowledge the right of the Ukrainian people to an independent choice and sovereignty against Russian aggression, and as a reminder of the tragedy that bridges the histories of the two countries. Importantly, this also means that the Western coalition's non-recognition policy, as in the Cold War era, is seen as the strongest tool in Ukraine's hands to regain control over the territory of Crimea in the future.

The shared soviet era raises a number of similar issues in the histories of Latvia and Ukraine, such as the process of “decommunization.” For example, turnout for May 9 celebrations of the end of the “Great Patriotic War,” as the soviets called WWII, is still high in Latvia, suggesting that identification with one or another version of history is still shaped within the specific ethnic community and does not match the official narrative. Decommunization started in Latvia with the taking down of the Lenin Monument next to the current Cabinet of Ministers on August 24, 1991, together with at least 60 Lenin monuments across Latvia, while the same process picked up speed in Ukraine only in 2014.

In this regard there are some lessons that each country can offer the other. For example, Ukraine's decision to open KGB archives to the public in 2016 has been treated with interest in Latvia. Although the issue has been a "hot potato" in political circles and public debate for years, it is now riding a wave of politicization in the run-up to Latvia's October 2018 parliamentary elections. On the other hand, Latvia struggled to consolidate an ethnically-divided society by consolidating the national memory before Ukraine ever launched its own version of the politics of memory. Clearly, especially after Crimea, the two-community state is still directly linked to diverging interpretations of history on a state-narrative level, and thus seen as a direct threat to Latvia's sovereignty.

Latvian policy is reflected in the 2011 *Guidelines for a national identity, civil society and integration*,⁴⁴ The main policy aims implemented by the coordinating institutions—primarily the Ministries of Culture and Education—are directed at the promotion of the Latvian language and the Latvian cultural environment, as well as a common understanding of history through education, various integration-oriented projects, and public commemoration of key official holidays like the May 4 Day of the Restoration of Independence (4 May), the November 11 Lāčplēsis or Memorial Day (11 November) and the November 18 Day of the Proclamation of Independence. However, poor trust in government in both countries is one of the factors that could well get in the way of official attempts to achieve social reconciliation.

On the other hand, there are examples of a very different attitude towards Latvia's soviet monuments, too. For instance, the Salaspils memorial, erected in 1967 in honor of the victims of Nazism, right on the spot of a former Nazi concentration camp and has now been incorporated into the Latvian cultural canon. Interestingly, this space has managed to reconcile the contradictory histories of the different elements of Latvian society, as the Salaspils memorial is visited by high-ranking Latvian state officials on May 8 and by those commemo-

⁴⁴ *Likumi.lv, Nacionālās identitātes, pilsoniskās sabiedrības un integrācijas politikas pamatnostādnes 2012.-2018.gadam [Guidelines for National Identity, Civil Society and Integration Policy for 2012-2018], 20/11/2011. Available at: <https://likumi.lv/doc.php?id=238195>*

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rating the Great Patriotic War on May 9. Significantly, Latvians tend to think of WWII primarily through the lens of their own tragedy, which overshadows the commemoration of the Holocaust, which is only gradually emerging with the help of the Žanis Lipke Memorial. Overall, the reshaping of the collective memory à l'Européenne, that is, by looking to the future, rather than the past, and working for a common European future, is being promoted by intellectuals and historians in Latvia.

Another especially important battle for the Baltic states and for Ukraine is ridding themselves of the epithet “post/former Soviet.”⁴⁵ Moreover, it's not just an internal battle in terms of dealing with the soviet heritage, but an external one as well—a quest for recognition of difference from the rest of the former bloc that seems more reconciled with being part of Russia's “sphere of influence.” This battle is also a quest to rid themselves from the “otherness” bestowed by the historic ideological conflicts and prejudices that this term connotes. Latvia is helping Ukraine go through the process of shaping its identity through artistic cooperation: in 2016, the Riga Center for Modern Art and the National Museum of Art in Kyiv held a joint exhibition called “Identity. Behind the curtain of incertitude.”⁴⁶ However, the search for a new term remains without result as Latvia and Ukraine deal with some of the more damaging hangovers of their soviet heritage, such as pervasive corruption.⁴⁷

The reshaping of the collective memory à l'Européenne, that is, by looking to the future, rather than the past, and working for a common European future, is being promoted by intellectuals and historians in Latvia

⁴⁵ *Lsm.lv*, “Baltic states: Please stop calling us ‘former soviet’ countries”, 06/01/2017. Available at: <https://eng.lsm.lv/article/politics/politics/updated-baltic-states-please-stop-calling-us-former-soviet-countries.a217911/>

⁴⁶ *Platforma*, “Identity: Behind the curtain of incertitude,” March 18-May 22, 2016. Available at: <https://platfor.ma/ukr/art/vistavka-identichnist-za-zavisoyu-neoznachenosti/>

⁴⁷ *Diena.lv*, “Delna: Latvijas vieta Korupcijas uztveres indeksā norāda uz politiskās gribas trūkumu” [Delna: Latvia's place in the Corruption Perceptions Index indicates a lack of political will], 22/02/2018. Available at: <https://www.diena.lv/raksts/latvija/zinas/delna-latvijas-vieta-korupcijas-uztveres-indeksa-norada-uz-politiskas-gribas-trukumu-14191775>

2.4. TRADE AND INVESTMENT: ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT

Ukrainian-Latvian trade has been growing steadily in recent years. In 2017, it jumped 27% and reached \$462 mln, with a positive balance of \$102.6 mln for Ukraine.⁴⁸ Ukraine exports food and agricultural products, fuels and oil, clothes, ferrous metals and furniture to Latvia, while Latvia sells pharmaceutical products, spirits, non-alcoholic beverages, etc.

As of 2017, 1,426 enterprises with Ukrainian capital were registered in Latvia, with key spheres being finance and insurance, such as PrivatBank, and real estate. Several premium-class hotels of the Accor Group, the Mercure and the Pullman in Riga, are also known to be capitalized by Ukrainian investors. Latvian investments in Ukraine are also focused on finance and insurance, plus retail outlets and real estate. Other Latvian businesses in Ukraine include cloud computing provider Lattelecom, AirBaltic, which is expected to extend its destinations to include Lviv, Riga Khlib, which opened a bakery in Chernihiv in 2016.

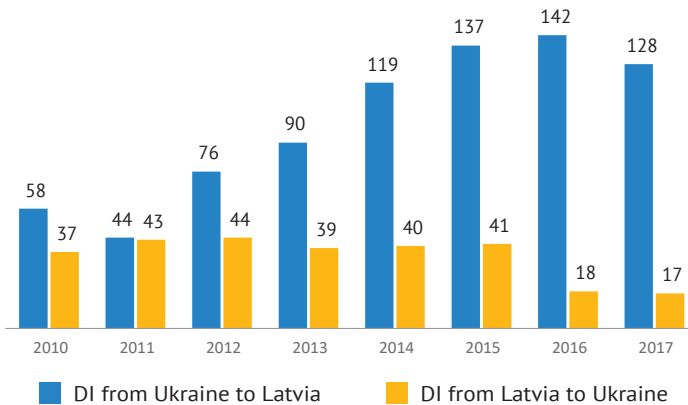
At this time, Ukrainian investment in Latvia outweighs Latvian investment in Ukraine (see graph below). Moreover, Latvian investment in Ukraine has shrunk considerably, from €41 mln in 2015 to 17 mln in 2017. The reasons may be not only the relative size of the two economies but also market conditions. Of all the spheres where the two cooperate, however, economic cooperation between Ukraine and Latvia suffers from the stumbling blocks as all other commercial activity in Ukraine and Latvian businesses complain about the same issues that have plagued Ukraine's economy ever since independence: corruption, unreliable VAT refunds, and so on. According to the Corruption Perception Index 2018, Ukraine ranks 130th out of 180 countries. Still, ratings are not what Latvian decision-makers look at: for them, the clearest indicator of corruption is how difficult Latvian business find it, and, like other foreign

⁴⁸ *Ukrinform, Prime Minister of Ukraine Volodymyr Groysman and Prime Minister of Latvia Maris Kucinskis agreed on deepening economic cooperation between the countries, 02.03.2018. Available at <https://www.ukrinform.net/rubric-economy/2413931-ukraine-latvia-to-develop-investment-and-innovation-cooperation.html>*

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businesses, it's still difficult. The contrast is striking: despite its tiny size, Latvia attracted €13.4 bln in FDI in 2016, while Ukraine attracted only €3.6 bln. Attracting foreign investment and ensuring a business-friendly environment is another area where Ukraine could learn from Latvia.

Gr 1. Direct Investment (closing position), millions, EUR



Source: *Bank of Latvia*

The structure of Latvian trade has also changed because of the Russia-Ukraine conflict and subsequent counter-sanctions. Overall, the value of Latvian goods exported to the Russian market fell 32% from its 2013 peak of €1.16 bln to €0.78 bln in 2016.⁴⁹ However, Latvia's exports actually increased overall, thanks to its reorientation towards new markets in the Arab Emirates and China.

⁴⁹ Adam Klus, "Latvia – a potential target for Russian economic aggression?" in *New Eastern Europe*, 17/08/2017. Available at <http://neweasterneurope.eu/2017/08/17/latvia-a-potential-target-for-russian-economic-aggression/>

As a result, the Ministry of Economy sees this development as very positive.⁵⁰

Trade and investment could receive a further boost after the renewal of the Investment and Development Agency of Latvia (LIAA) in Kyiv. Additional revenues for both parties could also be generated through agricultural and logistics projects, including the use of the Zubr container train, which connects the ports of Chornomorsk, Odesa and Pivdenniy with the ports of Riga, Ventspils, Liepāja and Tallinn.

One unpleasant matter overshadowing Ukraine-Latvia economic relations is connected to what is alleged to be an attempt by former officials to embezzle from Ukraine's state budget and transfer the funds to a private bank account in Latvia. The money was confiscated by the Latvian government. Fortunately, Latvia is prepared to retribute the money, as soon as Ukraine can provide evidence that it belonged to the public purse.⁵¹ So far, the government has not done so.

⁵⁰ *Authors' interview at the Ministry of Economics of Latvia, December 14, 2017.*

⁵¹ *Lsm.lv, "Latvia may keep further €25m of stolen Ukrainian funds," 27/11/2017. Available at: <https://eng.lsm.lv/article/society/crime/latvia-may-keep-further-25m-of-stolen-ukrainian-funds.a258829/>*

3. WHO'S WHO: KEY STAKEHOLDERS AND PRESSURE GROUPS

3.1. POLITICAL ELITES

The key institution that presents Latvia's policy towards Ukraine on an international scene is the Latvian Foreign Ministry, in the persons of FM Edgars Rinkēvičs, from the Vienotība or Unity party, and State Secretary Andrejs Pildegovičs. Rinkēvičs, who has held this post since 2011, has been outspoken in protesting Russia's aggression in Ukraine, supporting the country's territorial integrity and promoting the idea of Euro-Atlantic integration for Ukraine. Another strong voice of support was PM Laimdota Straujuma (Unity), who led Latvia through the Presidency of the Council of the EU.⁵² Overall, this stance is shared by the majority of high-ranking members of Latvia's political elite. The Latvian Embassy in Ukraine and personally Ambassador Juris Poikāns actively carry out Latvia's policy towards Ukraine on the ground.

As events unfolded in March 2014, most of the political parties in Latvia spoke as one in support of Ukraine's territorial integrity, sovereignty and independence. The Saeima's coalition parties – the Greens and Farmers (Zaļo un Zemnieku Savienība), Unity⁵³ and the National Alliance⁵⁴ – also conveyed the European aspirations of the Ukrainian people and demanded immediate international support. A less unambiguous view was expressed by the key opposition party,

52 Delfi.lv, "Straujuma: izaicinājumi ir lieli, bet Krima ir un būs Ukrainas daļa" [Straujuma: The stakes are high, but Crimea is and will be part of Ukraine], 28/04/2015. Available at: <http://www.delfi.lv/news/eiropa/zinas/straujuma-izaicinajumi-ir-lieli-bet-krima-ir-un-bus-ukrainas-dala.d?id=45897045>

53 Tvnet.lv, "'Vienotības' valde asi nosoda Krievijas bruņotās provokācijas Ukrainā" [The leadership of Unity strongly condemns Russia's armed provocation in Ukraine], 02/03/2014. Available at: http://www.tvnet.lv/zinas/viedokli/499622-vienotibas_valde_asi_nosoda_krievijas_brunotas_provokacijas_ukraina

54 Lāsma Grundule, "Dzintars: Notiekošais Ukrainā lien pie mums" [Dzintars: The current situation in Ukraine is creeping towards us], 07/12/2013. Available at: <https://www.diena.lv/raksts/latvija/zinas/papildinats-1602-dzintars-notiekosais-ukraina-lien-pie-mums-1400035869>

Saskaņa or Harmony, the only relatively pro-Russian party in Latvia and one that seeks to represent the Russian-speaking population in Latvia as its main constituency. Although in opposition in the parliament, Harmony is an important political player, as it won the largest number of seats in the 2014 election and is the governing party in Riga city council.

The party's pro-Russian leanings damaged its standing in Latvia after the start of the Russian aggression in Ukraine in 2014. As the 2018 parliamentary elections drew closer, Harmony renounced its cooperation agreement with United Russia, the ruling party in Russia. Instead, Harmony has sought to establish more ties with the EU, finally obtaining admission to the European Socialist Party, a goal it had been working towards for 11 years. Generally, Harmony has expressed full support for the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Ukraine, while avoiding the formulation of a clear position vis-à-vis the conflict in Ukraine and actually criticizing EU sanctions as ineffective,⁵⁵ but this has not affected the Latvian policy in any way.

Indeed, the current and future impact of Harmony is being balanced by the current opinions leaders and decision-makers regarding Ukraine: MPs Atis Lejiņš (U), Rihards Kols (NA), Lolita Čigāne (U), Saeima Speaker Ināra Mūrniece (NA), and Ainārs Mežulis (GF) who is also the head of the Interparliamentary Group for Cooperation with Ukraine. Former President Vaira Vīķe-Freiberga (1999-2007) has continuously expressed her support for Ukraine and is also well-respected and popular in Ukraine.

The pro-Russian stance of some Latvian politicians has been most vocally expressed outside Latvia, in the European Parliament by MEPs Andrejs Mamikins and Tatjana Ždanoka (Russian Union of Latvia), has had a decades-long career promoting ties with Russia and Vladimir Putin's regime. In 2014, she visited Crimea and expressed support for the results of the Crimean referendum, while Mamikins suggested

⁵⁵ *Latvijas Republikas Saeima, Latvijas Republikas Saeima Sēdes transkripts [Transcript of a session of the Saeima] 06/03/2014. Available at: [http://titania.saeima.lv/LIVS11/saeimalivs_imp.nsf/0/1d334817f3d4003cc2257c9e0040def9/\\$FILE/LM0607_0.htm](http://titania.saeima.lv/LIVS11/saeimalivs_imp.nsf/0/1d334817f3d4003cc2257c9e0040def9/$FILE/LM0607_0.htm)*

3. Who's who: key stakeholders and pressure groups

to take the issue of the annexation off the agenda for a while and restore trade with Russia.⁵⁶ Ždanoka, Mamikins and like-minded politicians inside Latvia – Vladimirs Buzajevs and Jakovs Pliners – do not affect Latvian foreign policy, but they do provide fertile ground and a constituency for Russia to work through to extend its influence.⁵⁷

On the Ukrainian side, the key figures in Ukraine-Latvia dialog, apart from President Poroshenko and Foreign Minister Klimkin, are MFA First European Department Director Vasyl Khymentets and Interparliamentary Group for Cooperation with Latvia Chair Oleksandr Kodola. Refat Chubarov, head of the Mejlis of the Crimean Tatars, is also well known in Latvia, not only for his political activities but also for the fact that he lived in Latvia for a number of years and even sat on the Riga City Council in 1989-1991. Unfortunately, Ukraine has been missing its own key representative in Latvia, an ambassador, for over a year now, after Yevhen Perebyinis left in early 2017. Although Ukraine's interim Chargé d'Affaires Alisa Podolyak has earned praise for her work both among Latvian experts and within the Ukrainian community in Latvia, the absence of an official appointment is a hindrance to smooth, successful bilateral dialog.

⁵⁶ *The Baltic Times*, "MEP Mamikins: Forgetting Crimea occupation would improve our economic situation," 18/03/2017. Available at https://www.baltictimes.com/mep_mamikins__forgetting_crimea_occupation_would_improve_our_economic_situation/

⁵⁷ *Andris Kudors, The Eastern Direction in Latvia's Foreign Policy, in "The Centenary of Latvia's Foreign Affairs. Ideas and Personalities," ed. by Diāna Potjomkina, Andris Sprūds, Valters Ščerbinskis, Latvian Institute of International Affairs, 2016, p. 179.*

3.2. LATVIAN CIVIL SOCIETY AND CULTURE SPACE

Public awareness of Ukraine has grown in Latvia since 2014, although ordinary Latvians know little about modern Ukraine, apart from some bits about the conflict.

Still, civil society organizations have been collecting humanitarian aid for Ukraine. The crisis stirred the mobilization of voluntary charity organizations, one of the most prominent being Ukraine SOS, which transferred over €1 mln⁵⁸ to Ukraine over 2014-2016, and various campaigns. The Latvian Union of Municipalities also collected in support of the Chernihiv war hospital in 2015.⁵⁹ This was added to funds provided from the state budget in 2014 and 2015 to purchase power generators, blankets, food and clothing, as well as assistance for IDPs.⁶⁰ Latvia has also brought in over 200 children of wounded or KIA soldiers for vacations. In 2018, Latvia plans to open a donation-based socio-psychological rehabilitation center called Phoenix for veterans of this conflict.⁶¹ This will be in addi-

58 *Latvia is one of the closest Ukrainian partners—Ukraine's Ambassador to Latvia, Ukraine Crisis Media Center, November 23, 2016. Available at <http://uacrisis.org/ua/49885-latviya>; Latvija par Ukrainu, SOS palīdzība Ukrainas armijai. Available at: <http://www.latvijaparukrainu.lv/lv/sos+palidziba+ukrainas+armijai>*

59 *Tvnet.lv, "Latvijas pašvaldības Ukrainas slimnīcām saziedojušas aptuveni 9000 eiro" [Municipalities in Latvia have donated approximately €9,000 to Ukrainian hospitals], 02/08/2015. Available at: http://www.tvnet.lv/zinas/latvija/570075-latvijas_pasvaldibas_ukrainas_slimnicam_saziedojusas_aptuveni_9000_eiro*

60 *Latvijas Republikas Iekšlietu ministrija, Latvija sniegs humāno palīdzību Ukrainai [Latvia will provide humanitarian aid to Ukraine], 23/01/2015. Available at: http://www.iem.gov.lv/lat/aktualitates/informacija_medijiem/?doc=29473*

61 *Medicine.lv, "Latvijā plāno atvērt par ziedojumiem tapušu rehabilitācijas iestādi Ukrainas kara veterāniem" [In Latvia, plans to open a rehabilitation institution for donations to Ukrainian war veterans], 27/10/2017. Available at: <http://medicine.lv/raksti/latvija-plano-atvert-par-ziedojumiem-tapusu-rehabilitācijas-iestadi-ukrainas-kara-veteraniem>*

3. Who's who: key stakeholders and pressure groups

tion to the rehabilitation services provided to over 20 soldiers at the Vaivari rehab center.⁶²

Interestingly, the topic of war has penetrated Latvian arts and in this way reached the Latvian public. In addition to political activism, cultural activities focusing on Ukraine have picked up pace. A number of movies, such as the 2014 film "Invisible City" by Viesturs Kairiņš,⁶³ the 2015 films "Bridge from Latvia to Donbas: How we are helping Ukraine" by Imants Liepiņš⁶⁴ and "The Close War" by Atis Klimovičš, Sandijs Semjonovs and Kārlis Lesiņš,⁶⁵ and the 2016 film "Volunteers" by Jānis Vingris⁶⁶ have been matched by books such as "Ukraine. Life, death and the internal revolution" by Liepiņš, published in 2015⁶⁷ and a recent analysis of events in Ukraine by Alvis

The topic of war has penetrated Latvian arts

⁶² *Nacionālais rehabilitācijas centrs Vaivari, Ukrainas prezidents apciemo Ukrainas karavīrus NRC "Vaivari" [Ukrainian President Visits the Vaivari National Rehabilitation Center for Ukrainian Soldiers], 04/04/2017. Available at: <http://www.nrcvaivari.lv/lv/content/ukrainas-prezidents-apciemo-ukrainas-karavirus-nrc-vaivari>*

⁶³ *Nacionālais kino centrs, Neredzamā pilsēta. Available at: <http://nkc.gov.lv/arhivs/neredzama-pilseta/>*

⁶⁴ *Tvnet.lv, "Pirmizrādi piedzīvos dokumentāla filma par Ukrainu" [Premiere of a documentary about Ukraine], 15/06/2015. Available at: <http://www.tvnet.lv/izklaide/kino/564877-pirmizradi-piedzivos-dokumentala-filma-par-ukrainu>*

⁶⁵ *Lsm.lv, "LTV pirmizrādi piedzīvos filma "Tuvais karš" – stāsts par latviešiem Ukrainas karā" [LTV will premiere the movie "The Close War," The Story of Latvians in the Ukrainian War], 10.07.2015. Available at: <http://www.lsm.lv/raksts/zinas/latvija/ltv-pirmizradi-piedzivos-filma-tuvais-kars--stasts-par-latviesiem-ukrainas-kara.a137114/>*

⁶⁶ *Diena.lv, "Jānis Vingris uzņēmis dokumentālo filmu par Ukrainas kara brīvprātīgajiem" [Jānis Vingris has made a documentary about the volunteers in the Ukrainian War], 11/03/2016. Available at: <https://www.diena.lv/raksts/kd/literatura/janis-vingris-uznemis-dokumentalo-filmu-par-ukrainas-kara-brivpratigajiem-14133326>*

⁶⁷ *Tvnet.lv, "Izdota šokējoši atklāta grāmata par Krimas okupāciju" [A shockingly open book on the occupation of Crimea], 20/02/2015. Available at: <http://www.tvnet.lv/izklaide/gramatas/548666-izdota-sokejosi-atklata-gramata-par-krimas-okupaciju>*

Marcinkēvičs, published 2017.⁶⁸ As a sign of cultural protest, Director Alvis Hermanis and the New Riga Theater cancelled a number of scheduled performances and other projects in Russia in 2014.⁶⁹ By contrast, the decision of the group Brainstorm to perform at the Nashestvije [Invasion] rock festival in Russia in 2015 caused a real stir in Latvia, especially as it was sponsored by the Russian Army.⁷⁰

The activities of the Embassy of Ukraine in Latvia have also become more visible with, for instance, the translation of Sergei Loiko's 2016 book about the battle for Donetsk Airport⁷¹ and an exhibition called "Ukraine. War and Peace" by Ksenia Fetisova at the Latvian National Library.⁷² In October 2017, the Ukrainian Embassy in Riga also supported the first Ukrainian Days of Culture in Riga.⁷³

Another development, indirectly linked to Ukraine's cultural impact in Latvia, was the cancellation of the Novaya Volna (New Wave)

68 Delfi.lv, "Klajā laika monogrāfija "Ukrainas krīze: divgalvainā ērgļa impērijas trieciens" [The launching of the monograph "The Ukrainian crisis: The Empire of the Two-Headed Eagle Strikes], 30/11/2017. Available at: <http://www.delfi.lv/kultura/news/books/klaja-laista-monografija-ukrainas-krize-divgalvainagerla-imperijas-trieciens.d?id=49499921>

69 Delfi.lv, "Starptautiskais kultūras boikots pret Krieviju vēršas plašumā" [An international boycott of the arts against Russia is gaining traction] 10/03/2014. Available at: <http://www.delfi.lv/kultura/news/cultureenvironment/starptautiskais-kulturas-boikots-pret-krieviju-versas-plasuma.d?id=44287157>

70 Lsm.lv, "'Prāta Vētra" koncertē Krievijas armijas atbalstītā pasākumā" [Brainstorm will perform at an event sponsored by the Russian Army], 16/06/2015. Available at: <http://www.lsm.lv/raksts/zinas/latvija/prata-vetra-koncerte-krievijas-armijas-atbalstita-pasakuma.a137937/>

71 Lsm.lv, "Sergeja Loiko kara romāns «Lidosta» izdots latviešu valodā" [Sergei Loiko's war novel "Airport" is published in Latvian], 02/09/2016. Available at: <http://www.lsm.lv/raksts/kultura/literatura/sergeja-loiko-kara-romans-lidosta-izdots-latviesu-valoda.a199149/>

72 Latvijas Nacionālā bibliotēka, "Fotogrāfijas Ksenijas Fetisovas izstāde "Ukraina. Karš un Miers"" [Photos in Ksenia Fetisov's exhibition "Ukraine. War and peace"], 19/08/2017. Available at: <https://lnb.lv/tv/fotografes-ksenijas-fetisovas-izstade-ukraina-kars-un-miers>

73 Lsm.lv, "Rīgā pirmo reizi notiks Ukrainas kino dienas" [The first Ukrainian Cinema Days will take place in Riga], 10/10/2017. Available at: <http://www.lsm.lv/raksts/kultura/kino-foto-un-tv/riga-pirmo-reizi-notiks-ukrainas-kino-dienas.a253143/>

international music festival and four other events in 2015, as a tit-for-tat to Western sanctions. Since 2002, this event had taken place at the Dzintari Concert Hall in Jūrmala, a maritime resort that that was very popular among the soviet elite. Jūrmala still attracts many holidaymakers from Russia today. Despite the concern over the fifth largest city losing a key source of income, things turned out well enough: the city managed to reorient itself well. Immediately after the cancellation, tourism from Russia fell by 30%, but given the steep fall of the ruble, this was no surprise.⁷⁴ In fact, Russian tourists are still the second largest group to visit Latvia annually, the rate has been slowly recovering since its plunge in 2015.⁷⁵

Despite the fact that the festival occupied a particular niche in Latvian arts – and perhaps not the most flattering one, as the majority of Latvian-speakers found it hard to identify with the content of the program, – the departure of the show was most likely perceived as a loss only by a marginal group of Latvian society. Moreover, its place in the entertainment market did not stay vacant for long: it has since been replaced by solo performers such as Denis Matsuev, Giorgy Leps and Stas Mihaylov, new festivals such as Laima Vaikule's Rendez-vous and others hosting mostly Western artists, like Positivus and the Sunset Festival.⁷⁶ In 2016, the Ukrainian comedy group 95 Kvartal made an appearance in Jūrmala, too, hoping to win Latvian audiences and replace Novaya Volna with a festival called Made in Ukraine. Despite a promising concept, however, this festival did not have enough continuity and only a number of individual performances took place in 2017.

⁷⁴ Diena.lv, "Jūrmalā Jaunā viļņa vietā uzsvars uz Baltiju un Skandināviju" [In Jūrmala, more emphasis on the Baltic region and Scandinavia to replace the New Wave], 14/12/2015. Available at: <https://www.diena.lv/raksts/latvija/zinas/jurmala-jauna-vilna-vieta-uzsvars-uz-baltiju-un-skandinaviju-14122865>

⁷⁵ Aiga Pelane, "Krievijas ekonomiskās problēmas nav ietekmējušas Latvijas tūrisma nozari - skaitļi un fakti" [Russia's economic problems have no impact on Latvia's tourism sector – facts and figures], 20/02/2017 Available at: <https://www.lsm.lv/raksts/zinas/ekonomika/krievijas-ekonomiskas-problemas-nav-ietekmejusas-latvijas-turisma-nozari-skaitli-un-fakti.a224505/>

⁷⁶ Latvijas Avīze, "'Biļešu serviss': kopš nav 'Jaunā viļņa', cilvēki vairāk iet uz solokonzertiem" [Since the departure of the New Wave, people attend more solo concerts], 28/06/2018. Available at: <http://www.la.lv/bilesu-serviss-kops-nav-jauna-vilna-cilveki-vairak-iet-uz-solokonzertiem/>

3.3. MEDIA AND THE INFORMATION SPACE

As a multiethnic society, Latvia has the biggest proportion of ethnic Russians among former soviet republics, and roughly 11.4% of them are non-citizens. While Russian-speakers are a major constituency in Latvia, being a Russian speaker or even ethnic Russian in Latvia does not mean the person has a pro-Russian stance, since 37.2% of Latvians speak Russian as their first language and some 43.7% as their second. In February 2012, a constitutional referendum to establish Russian as a second state language was rejected by a landslide vote of 74.8%⁷⁷ and even such opinion leaders of Russian origin as Mikhail Gruzdev campaigned against. While Russian speakers seem to have a different opinion than Latvian speakers vis-à-vis the role of Russia in the war in Ukraine,⁷⁸ there is also a predominant understanding that the ethnic divide is mostly an artificial element used for political purposes rather than a real issue or threat to Latvia.⁷⁹

One of the outcomes is that two major media environments exist in Latvia: the Latvian-speaking and the Russian-speaking, with the latter one arguably more prone to reproduce Russian disinformation and propaganda. Ukrainians in Latvia have a saying: "Tell me which paper you read and I will tell you what your attitude to Ukraine is." The Latvian-language media, both in Latvia and Russia, is largely resistant to foreign messages as regards security threats to the country.⁸⁰ As an consequence, reporting on Ukraine seems to keep

⁷⁷ *Diena.lv*, "DP: Valodas referenduma organizētāju finanses veidoja arī Krievijas iedzīvotāju ziedojumi" ["State Security Police: The finances of those who organized the referendum on language included donations from residents of Russia], 22/02/2014. Available at: <https://www.diena.lv/raksts/latvija/zinas/dp-valodas-referenduma-organizetaju-finanses-veidoja-ari-krievijas-iedzivotaju-ziedojumi-14045284>

⁷⁸ *Latvijas Nacionālās aizsardzības akadēmija – Drošības un stratēģiskās pētniecības centrs*, opt.cit., p.4

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ Māris Andžāns Ilvija Burģe, et al., "Latvijas plašsaziņas līdzekļu noturība pret citu valstu vēstījumiem: Krievijas faktors NATO 2016. gada samita kontekstā" [The resilience of Latvia's media environment to informational messages from other countries: The Russian factor in the context of the 2016 NATO Summit], *Latvijas Ārpolitikas Institūts*, 2016. Available at: http://liia.lv/en/publications/latvijas-plassazinas-lidzeklu-noturiba-pret-citu-valstu-vestijumiem-560_p.3

3. Who's who: key stakeholders and pressure groups

up with normal standards of professionalism and objectivity, despite occasional deviations from the rule in Russian-language outlets.⁸¹ Interest in and expertise on Ukraine spiked after November 2013, and remained high throughout 2014 and 2015, when the Latvijas Avīze paper and the online sources Lsm and Delfi published exclusive material on the situation in Ukraine. Latvijas Televīzija, Delfi and TVnet base their information predominantly on Western reporting, with the exception of Interfax and TASS, and stand in contrast to Russian-owned PBK (Первый Балтийский канал), which includes NEWSru.com and Korrespondent (Корреспондент).⁸²

3.4. THE UKRAINIAN COMMUNITY IN LATVIA

The Ukrainian community in Latvia constitutes 2.5% of Latvia's population, around 55,000. The first wave of migration from Ukraine to Latvia was over the 1950s-1980s and was mostly young Ukrainians who came to the Latvian SSR for work, military retirees and ethnic Ukrainians who had returned from exile in Siberia.⁸³ Other waves took place during the independence period, both before and after Russia's aggression in Ukraine. And so, the Ukrainian community in Latvia is composed of different waves of immigrants with different levels of awareness of their national identity, with older immigrants mostly identifying as soviet and not necessarily accepting the new, independent and self-aware Ukraine.

Still, a number of Ukrainian organizations are active in Latvia, such as the Congress of Ukrainians in Latvia, the Latvian Ukrainian Union, the Dnipro Cultural Society, and the Ukraine Support Community, with both Ukrainians and Latvians as members. A crucial hub of Ukrainian identity in Latvia is Riga's Ukrainian secondary school, which was founded in 1991 and is financed by the Latvian state budget. It applies the 60/40 principle in teaching, with 60% of subjects taught

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 41

⁸² *Ibid.*, 36

⁸³ *Ukraine in Latvia, Ukrainians in Latvia*. Available at: <http://latvia.mfa.gov.ua/en/ukraine-lv/ukrainians-in-lv>

in Latvian and 40% in Ukrainian. Ukrainian literature is also taught at the Slavic Department of the University of Latvia. Ukrainian culture centers operate in Ventspils, Rēzekne, Liepāja, Daugavpils and Vangaži.⁸⁴

However, in the Latvian mind, “Slavic” is often automatically associated with “Russian,” and so contemporary Ukrainian culture remains overshadowed. Yet, this is not just because both stereotypical views among Latvians but, more importantly, for lack of strategic engagement from Ukraine itself. It is also obvious that, since Russia’s invasion, interest in Ukraine is disproportionately higher in Latvia than interest in Latvia is in Ukraine. Indeed, Latvia stories are only picked up by Ukrainian media in special cases, such as a high-level visit or a major political event.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

4. EXISTING AND POTENTIAL RISKS AND CONFLICTS

4.1. CHANGE IN LATVIAN POLICY TOWARDS UKRAINE AFTER THE OCTOBER 2018 ELECTIONS

According to the latest survey by Latvian pollster SKDS, Harmony remains the most popular party in Latvia, with 22.5% support. The runners-up are Greens & Farmers Union with 13.1% and the National Alliance with 9.5%.⁸⁵ Still, Harmony might well end up in opposition again, since the other major parties rule out a coalition with it. This outcome is currently the most popular in Latvia, only emphasizing how the security situation in Ukraine has sobered the views of Latvian voters. However, almost every fourth Latvian voter, 23.5%, remains undecided so far, and this could shift the balance, with Harmony getting enough seats to build a coalition with a minor party. Indeed, in the last municipal elections in 2017, the vote in Riga ran across lines, allowing Harmony to secure both the capital and a regional stronghold, in both cases with the Russian-speaking vote adding up to roughly 50%.⁸⁶

Probability *Low.* In the first place, it's still too early to speculate about who will form the Government in Latvia. So far, there are no anti-Ukrainian politicians in the Latvian polity—at least not openly so. In Latvia, being a pro-Russian politician does not necessarily mean being anti-Ukrainian, and the sense of threat from Russia among voters is another constraint on the Latvian pro-Russian politicians. Even Russians in Latvia tend to be “Euro-Russians,” with a

In Latvia, being a pro-Russian politician does not necessarily mean being anti-Ukrainian

⁸⁵ *Lsm.lv*, “Poll says six parties can make it into Latvian parliament a year before election”, 31.10.2017, <http://eng.lsm.lv/article/politics/politics/poll-says-six-parties-can-make-it-into-latvian-parliament-a-year-before-election.a255635/>

⁸⁶ Jānis Eglītis, “Etniskais balsojums Rīgā ir realitāte: “Saskaņas” sarakstā visvairāk izsvitroti latviskie uzvārdi, bet “latviešu sarakstos” – krieviskie” [Ethnic voting in Riga is a reality: On Harmony’s list, the most distinguished candidates are those with Latvian surnames, but in the “Latvian listings,” those with Russian surnames], 05/06/2017. Available at : <https://skaties.lv/zinas/latvija/sabiedriba/etniskais-balsojums-riga-ir-realitate-saskanas-saraksta-visvairak-izsvitroti-latviskie-uzvardi-bet-latviesu-sarakstos-krieviskie/>

hybrid Russian-Latvian identity. Various parties in Latvia have stated that, whatever the results of elections, Latvian policy towards Ukraine will not change, since there is an internal consensus about Latvian foreign policy priorities..

Appointing an ambassador as soon as possible is vital for Ukraine's national interests in this pre-election and later post-election period

How to avoid? While Ukraine cannot influence the results of Latvian elections, it should definitely maintain dialog with all the political stakeholders among the governing elite as well as with the opposition. Appointing an ambassador as soon as possible is vital for Ukraine's national interests in this pre-election and later post-election period.

4.2. DETERIORATION IN RELATIONS OVER POOR BUSINESS CONDITIONS IN UKRAINE

After a temporary decline in 2014-2015, Ukraine-Latvia trade is on the rise again, with both Ukraine's exports and investments outweighing the Latvian. So far, Latvian businessmen remain wary of Ukraine's business environment. which sends a negative signal to Riga.

Probability *Medium.* Ukraine is more important to Latvia politically than economically, since three quarters of Latvian trade is with the EU. However, Latvia remains concerned with the implementation of reforms and the battle with corruption in Ukraine, especially in the context of the DCFTA with the EU. The need to push reform, combined with complaints from Latvian businesses, could, at some point, deal a major blow to Latvian enthusiasm and support.

How to avoid? The solution is as simple as it is complicated: Ukraine must take steps to improve its business climate, not only for the sake of relations with Latvia but for its international business image. To quote a high-ranking

Latvian official, “85% of Ukraine’s success depends on Ukraine itself, 10% on its friends and 5% on good luck and overall global developments.” The first sign for Latvia that reforms are happening in Ukraine will be when Latvian businesses report that their problems are resolved.

4.3. SUSCEPTIBILITY OF PUBLIC OPINION IN LATVIA TO RUSSIAN DISINFORMATION

The high proportion of occasional consumers of Russian media, 63%, has been a widely-debated topic.⁸⁷As a result, Latvian experts and policy makers pay close attention to the question of how resilient the Latvian information environment is to Russian disinformation.⁸⁸

Probability *Low to medium.* The popularity of Russian media in Latvia should not be exaggerated. PBK is the only Russia-proper source that manages to compete with the Latvian and other foreign media outlets. Moreover, it is mostly watched for entertainment—movies and TV serials. What’s more, only 32% of Latvians actually prefer Russian media to Latvian outlets. In addition, Latvia’s policy-making and expert circles are aware of the threats posed by Russian propaganda. It is with a view to countering Russian propaganda that StratCom, the NATO Strategic Communications Center

⁸⁷ *Latvijas Republikas Kultūras ministrija, “Latvijas iedzīvotāju medijpratība: kvantitatīvs pētījums” [The media-savviness of the Latvian population: A quantitative study], 2017. Available at: https://www.km.gov.lv/uploads/ckeditor/files/mediju_politika/petijumi/Medijpratiba_petijuma%20rezultati_Latvijas%20Fakti_18_07_2017.pdf, p. 9, 13*

⁸⁸ *Stopfake.org, How resilient is Latvia’s information space to Kremlin propaganda?, 28.02.2018, Available at: <https://www.stopfake.org/en/how-resilient-is-latvia-s-information-space-to-kremlin-propaganda/>*

of Excellence was established in Riga in January 2014. The Ministry of Defense also introduced special classes on national defense and media literacy in secondary schools.

How to avoid? While Ukraine has little ability to influence Latvia's information environment, it can share best practice in countering Russian disinformation, such as the StopFake project. It can also cooperate with StratCom through the Ukraine-NATO Platform on countering hybrid threats.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

Overall, there are two key problems in Ukraine-Latvia relations, and the solution to both of them depends on Ukraine: appointing an ambassador and improving business conditions. Other recommendations are not so much about problem-solving as about deepening and enriching relations between the two countries.

1. Ukraine's President must appoint an ambassador to Latvia as soon as possible. 2018 is crucial both because of upcoming parliamentary elections in Latvia and the centenary of Latvia-Ukraine diplomatic relations. Appointing an ambassador to Latvia is not only crucial to Ukraine's interests but is also an eloquent political gesture. The absence of an ambassador, on the other hand, could well be interpreted by Latvian policy makers as a sign that Latvia is a low priority for Ukraine.
2. By carrying out reforms in the fight against corruption, judiciary and business regulations, Ukraine will not only strengthen bilateral relations with Latvia but also provide Latvia with arguments for the country's membership in the EU and NATO. Failing to do so, by contrast, will work against Ukraine in both cases.
3. A century of historical ties with Ukraine is very important for the Latvian identity. Its Ukrainian partners—diplomats, MPs and so on—should emphasize the equal importance of these ties for Ukraine in communicating with their Latvian counterparts. After all, these ties are a matter of national pride in the history of statehood for both countries.
4. With 2018 the centenary of Latvia-Ukraine diplomatic relations, there is a perfect occasion for both countries to promote each other among their populations. Latvia has already made a number of steps in this direction, with the most recent one being a special issue of one of Ukraine's most popular magazine, *Novoye Vremya*, dedicated to various topics about Latvia. Ukraine could strike a similar partnership with Latvian media, especially given that some Ukrainian journalists already work in Riga and are prepared to supply topics and contacts.

5. Similarly, a fair with various “Made in Ukraine” products, from clothes to books and pop culture, is an opportunity not to be missed. While big-name Ukrainian artists like Okean Elzy and Onuka are relatively known in Latvia, it is Ukraine’s job to prove to Latvians that “Slavic” does not necessarily mean “Russian and dull,” but is also “Ukrainian, modern and trendy.”
6. Ukraine should continue to learn from Latvia in a number of realms: fighting corruption, developing agriculture, education and minority policy, promoting urban development, and working with the diaspora to make the Latvian experience better known in Ukraine. To this end, Ukraine’s government and NGOs could hold a conference or series of workshops in Kyiv entitled “Latvian lessons in state-building for Ukraine.”
7. Ukrainian institutions that borrow from Latvian experience in state-building should ensure that institutional memory of these practices is maintained. Latvian partners report frustration about the frequent turnover of staff at Ukraine’s state institutions, which often means that they have to start the experience-sharing process from square one.
8. Given the admiration that exists among various groups in Latvian society towards Ukraine’s civil society, it is worth holding a Latvian-Ukrainian civil society forum in Riga, with the most prominent CSOs and NGOs sharing their best practices in a wide range of areas, from fighting corruption to fighting Russian disinformation.

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NEW EUROPE CENTER

18/1G Prorizna str., office 28, Kyiv, 01034

<http://neweurope.org.ua/>



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