

OFFICIAL NAME: Republic of Latvia

CAPITAL: Riga

SYSTEM OF GOVERNMENT: Unitary Multiparty Republic

AREA: 64,500 Sq Km (24,900 Sq Mi)

ESTIMATED 2000 POPULATION: 2,587,000



LOCATION AND GEOGRAPHY: Latvia is a former republic of the USSR. It is bound by the Baltic Sea to the west, the Gulf of Riga and Estonia to the north, Russia to the east, Belarus to the southeast and Lithuania to the south. The country is generally low lying with a gentle undulating terrain interspersed by hills and ridges. Along the Baltic Sea coast including the Gulf of Riga, the coastline is smooth and fringed by low muddy beaches and sand dunes. Latvia is well endowed with forests, lakes, small streams and peat bogs while the principal river is the Daugava or Western Dvina. Major Cities (pop. est.); Riga 804,000, Daugavpils 120,900, Liepaja 95,000, Jelgava 69,400, Jurmala 55,300 (1993). Land Use; forested 44%, pastures 13%, agricultural-cultivated 26%, other 17% (1993).

CLIMATE: Latvia has a transitional climate between the maritime climate of West Europe and the continental climate of Russia. Winters are long and cold while summers are warm with rainfall heaviest during summer and autumn. Average annual precipitation varies from 560 to 790 mm (21 to 31 inches) and average temperature ranges are from -1 degrees Celsius (30 degrees Fahrenheit) in January to 17 degrees Celsius (63 degrees Fahrenheit) in June.

PEOPLE: The principal ethnic majority are the Latvians who account for 54% of the population while 34% are Russians, 5% are Belarussians and 4% are Ukrainians. Other ethnic minorities include Poles, Lithuanians, Tartars and Jews.

DEMOGRAPHIC/VITAL STATISTICS: Density; 40 persons per sq km (104 persons per sq mi) (1993). Urban-Rural; 69.5% urban, 30.5% rural (1991). Sex Distribution; 46.6% male, 53.4% female (1991). Life Expectancy at Birth; 63.7 years male, 74.5 years female (1991). Age Breakdown; 22% under 15, 21% 15 to 29, 21% 30 to 44, 18% 45 to 59, 13% 60 to 74, 5% 75 and over (1991). Birth Rate; 12.0 per 1,000 (1992). Death Rate; 13.5 per 1,000 (1992). Increase Rate; -1.5 per 1,000 (1992). Infant Mortality Rate; 17.4 per 1,000 live births (1992).

RELIGIONS: Mostly Christians, of which the majority are Lutherans with minorities of Orthodox Christians and Roman Catholics.

LANGUAGES: The official language is Latvian, although Russian is widely spoken and each ethnic minority also has its own language.

EDUCATION: Aged 15 or over and having attained: less than or primary 18.7%, some secondary 23.4%, secondary 46.4%, higher 11.5% (1989). Literacy; literate population aged 15 or over 98% (1989).

MODERN HISTORY - WWII TO 1993: On Aug. 21, 1991 Latvia declared its independence, although prior to independence its history was closely tied with that of the former Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). In Mar. 1953 Yosef Stalin died and was succeeded by Georgy Malenkov who was in turn forced to relinquish the party leadership to Nikita Khrushchev after a little over one week in power. In 1955 the Warsaw pact militarily aligned the Soviet Union with other communist countries and in Nov. 1956 the Soviet Red Army invaded Hungary to quell uprisings. In 1957 three communist ministers unsuccessfully attempted to depose Khrushchev which resulted in their expulsion from the central committee. In 1962 under Khrushchev's rule the USSR was involved in the Cuban Missile crisis and in the same year relations with China were broken off as a result of ideological differences. In Oct. 1964 Khrushchev was forced to retire and was succeeded by Leonid Brezhnev. In Aug. 1968 the Warsaw Pact forces led by the Red Army invaded Czechoslovakia to halt their Prague Spring reforms. In 1977 Brezhnev was elected President. In Nov. 1982 Brezhnev died and was succeeded by Yuri Andropov, the former head of the KGB. Andropov introduced limited economic reforms and established an anti-corruption program. In Feb 1984 Andropov died and was succeeded by Konstantin Chernenko who in turn died on Mar. 10, 1985. On Mar. 11, 1985 Mikhail Gorbachev was elected as Chernenko's successor and Gorbachev embarked on a program which restructured the USSR's relations with the West. Gorbachev also established Glasnost (openness) as well as Perestroika (restructuring and reform). In Apr. 1986 a meltdown in the reactor of the Chernobyl nuclear power station in Ukraine sent radioactive fallout across northern Europe. In Dec. 1987 the USSR and USA signed the Treaty on Intermediate Nuclear Forces (INF). In Feb. 1988 a dispute erupted between Armenia and Azerbaijan over the enclave of Nagorno-Karabakh which resulted in mass demonstrations and strikes in the two republics. In Dec. 1988 an earthquake in Armenia killed some 50,000 people. In Apr. 1989 troops violently repressed demonstrations in Tbilisi, the capital of Georgia. In Dec. 1989 the Lithuanian Parliament adopted multiparty politics. In Jan. 1990 Gorbachev visited Lithuania and was met by some 250,000 pro-independence demonstrators. In Feb. 1990 some 18 people were killed in riots over housing discrimination in Tajikistan. On May 4, 1990 Latvia declared its independence from the USSR. In May 1990 Boris Yeltsin was elected President of the Russian Federation and on Nov. 1, 1990 launched a 500 day plan to give the Russian Republic a free market economy. In June 1990 Nakhichevan an Azerbaijani enclave bordering Iran declared its intention for a unification with Iran while a civil war was escalating between Azerbaijan and Armenia. In the same month around 150 people were killed during ethnic clashes in Kyrgyzstan. In Jan 1991 another 15 people were killed as the Red Army seized a television station in Lithuania while

in Latvia the Soviet Black Berets killed 5 people in an attack on the ministry building. In the same month troops were being deployed in Ukraine, Georgia, Armenia and Moldova. In Mar. 1991 pro-Yeltsin demonstrators held a mass rally. On Aug. 18, 1991 as Gorbachev was vacationing in the Crimea, the Politburo hard liners attempted a coup to remove Gorbachev from power through the declaration of a State of Emergency under the control of a State Committee. Almost immediately republic leaders declared the emergency committee illegal as well as unconstitutional and began to barricade their parliaments as troops and tanks were deployed throughout the republics. By Aug. 20 senior officers had refused to order their troops to use force against the civilians and on Aug. 21, 1991 the coup collapsed as troops were ordered to return to their barracks. Immediately following the unsuccessful coup many republics suspended or purged the communist party and on Sept. 5, 1991 after 3 days of debate the 74 years of centralized communist control came to an end. On Sept. 17, 1991 Latvia was admitted to the UN and on Oct. 15, 1991 became a member of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE). In 1992 the domestic economic situation experienced further difficulties with price liberalization in Russia with some factories stopping production due to energy supply problems and raw materials. In July 1992 the government announced plans to replace the Rouble with their own legal tender, the Lat. In Oct. 1992 inflation was running at the monthly rate of 15%. Also during 1992 closer ties were established with Scandinavian countries and Germany. In 1993 tensions with Russia increased over Latvia's request for Russian troop withdrawals while Russia claimed Latvia was discriminating against ethnic Russian residents. On June 5, 1993 free elections were held for the Saeima (Parliament), although the voting was restricted to citizens of Latvia in 1940 and their immediate descendants with 34% of current residents not able to vote. On July 7, 1993 Guntis Ulmanis of the Latvian Farmers' Union (LZS) was elected President and Valdis Birkavs became Prime Minister of a LZS and Latvia's Way coalition government on July 20, 1993. In Nov. 1993 Russia proposed its troop withdrawal could be effected by Sept. 1994 on the condition that it retain its radar station at Skrunda for six further years as well as pension and social rights be guaranteed for ex-military personnel, although Latvia refused to accept the proposal and called for Russia to remove its troops by the end of 1993. Economically, the government did manage to reduce inflation in 1993, although standards in living and industrial production both deteriorated.

CURRENCY: The official currency is the Lat (LVL) divided into 100 Santims.

ECONOMY: Gross National Product; USD \$5,254,000,000 (1993). Public Debt; N/A. Imports; USD \$1,058,000,000 (1993). Exports; USD \$998,000,000 (1993). Tourism Receipts; N/A. Balance of Trade; USD -\$71,000,000 (1994). Economically Active Population; 1,358,400 or 52.9% of total population (1993). Unemployed; 7.3% (1994).

MAIN TRADING PARTNERS: Its main trading partners are the CIS.

MAIN PRIMARY PRODUCTS: Fish, Flax, Hydroelectric Power, Peat, Potatoes, Rye, Sugar Beets, Vegetables, Wheat.

MAJOR INDUSTRIES: Agriculture, Electric Motors, Fish Processing and Canning, Shipping, Sugar Refining, Telephone and Radio Equipment.

MAIN EXPORTS: Canned Fish, Dairy Products, Electric Motors, Fish Products, Telephone and Radio Equipment.

TRANSPORT: Railroads; route length 2,397 km (1,489 mi) (1991), passenger-km 3,929,000,000 (2,441,000,000 passenger-mi) (1991), cargo ton-km 16,700,000,000 (11,438,000,000 short ton-mi) (1991). Roads; length 60,224 km (37,421 mi) (1991). Vehicles; cars 328,436 (1991), trucks and buses 70,545 (1991). Merchant Marine; vessels 261 (1992), deadweight tonnage 1,46,900 (1992). Air Transport; passenger-km 2,999,000,000 (1,863,000,000 passenger-mi) (1991), cargo ton-km 22,000,000 (15,068,000 short ton-mi) (1990).

COMMUNICATIONS: Daily Newspapers; total of 188 with a total circulation of 3,676,000 (1991). Radio; receivers 1,396,000 (1991). Television; receivers 1,126,000 (1991). Telephones; units 694,300 (1993).

MILITARY: 2,650 (1995) total active duty personnel with 56.6% army, 37.7% navy and 5.7% air force while military expenditure accounts for 0.9% (1993) of the Gross National Product (GNP).