

Annual Report of the Minister of Foreign Affairs on the accomplishments and further work with respect to national foreign policy and the European Union 2022

Summary

Russia's full-scale unprovoked military aggression against Ukraine, its war crimes, the illegal annexation of certain Ukrainian territories, as well as persistent leveraging and blackmailing of the international community by employing threats of the use of weapons of mass destruction, of causing a nuclear catastrophe or other type of technogenic disaster, has significantly affected the international agenda. Russia's behaviour has aggravated current challenges to security and stability and caused new ones, including the threat of a global food crisis and disruptions in the energy supply. By applying brutal military force, violating the United Nations Charter, international law and its international obligations, Russia is seeking to occupy and destroy an independent, sovereign state so as to expand the territory of the Russian Federation and bring the world back to the politics of spheres of influence. Russia makes no secret, from its perspective, of this being a conflict not only with Ukraine but the West as a whole.

Under present conditions, the fundamental goals defined in Latvia's foreign policy—safeguarding the country's independence, sustainable security and public wellbeing—acquire an increasing importance. It is in Latvia's strategic interests to achieve Russia's defeat in its war against Ukraine and the restoration of Ukraine's territorial integrity within its internationally recognised borders. Russia's defeat should restore a functional rules-based international order and the credibility of a multilateral approach in international law, as well as prevent similar crimes of aggression from occurring in the future.

Counteracting Russia's war in Ukraine, along with support for Ukraine, emerged as the most vital task in the foreign policy of Latvia in 2022, and firmly restraining the threats related to Russia's actions will remain a top priority for the coming years. In view of the consistent and pragmatic position maintained in pursuit of relations with Russia and on the basis of a careful analysis of its policy and historical experience, in the wake of Russia's act of aggression, Latvia defined a principles-based and unequivocal national position and mapped out further lines of action. On the international stage, Latvia has been a leader in standing up for the development of a determined, unified and consistent approach at NATO and the European Union, building closer coordination with like-minded countries, actively voicing its position in international organisations, explaining to third country partners the need for a resolute response, and providing political, military, and economic support for Ukraine in its fight against Russia. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs pursued a coherent policy in close cooperation with the President of Latvia, the Saeima (the Latvian Parliament), line ministries, local authorities, social partners, and members of civil society.

Latvia's foreign policy in 2022 focused on the following directions: 1) provision of comprehensive support for Ukraine; 2) strengthening the security of Latvia and the region, promotion of NATO's adaptation to the new conditions; 3) implementation of bilateral, regional, and international countermeasures against Russia; 4) enhancement of the European Union's resilience, including mapping a course towards its energy independence, further implementation of a climate neutrality policy, digital transition, and reduction of external economic dependencies and influences on the European Union's economy.

In 2023, the attention of Latvia's foreign policy and the European Union matters will focus on the following:

1) further support for Ukraine, which will cover military, financial and humanitarian assistance, including support for reconstruction and reform through development cooperation instruments, as well as participation in the European Union's military mission to help with the training of Ukrainian soldiers;

2) further international isolation of Russia through continuing and, if necessary, expanding the sanctions policy, eliminating shortfalls in their implementation, seeking ways to call Russia to account for crimes of aggression and war crimes, to continue a sanctions policy against Belarus for its mutual responsibility for aggression against Ukraine and its invasion, as well as imposing sanctions on countries, should they decide to get involved in Russia's military aggression against Ukraine;

3) strengthening Latvia's security through continued enhancement of NATO's military presence and moving towards the establishment of a brigade level battle group, while progressively increasing host country support;

4) further strengthening of the European Union's resilience, effectiveness and influence:

- in the energy sector, Member States will have to agree on the measures for and amounts of collective purchase of natural gas, on the optimisation of the energy market architecture, adaptation and reform;

- in the development of the European Union's defence capabilities, priority will be given to attraction of investment to the defence industry by means of promoting joint defence procurement and addressing security issues in raw material supply chains. It is essential for Latvia that contributions to the strengthening of Member States' defence capabilities be complementary to the development of NATO's capabilities and work be continued on the enhancement of military mobility;

- it will be important to arrive at an independent, sustainable, and practical solution to the management of migration flows by adopting a new European Union migration and asylum pact. From Latvia's perspective, the national situation, geographical position, capacity and potentialities of each Member State, as well as its contribution to date should be taken into account. Latvia advocates the principle of voluntary distribution of migrants. Latvia expects that the capabilities of Member States to appropriately align with the instrumentalisation of migration as an element of hybrid threat will be improved;

- for the implementation of the Green Deal, the process of reaching an agreement between European Union institutions on a respective legislative package will have to be finalised;

- in the context of strengthening the Single Market, further solutions will be sought to eliminate existing hurdles;

5) the launch of the active phase in Latvia's lobbying campaign of candidacy for a seat on the United Nations Security Council for the period of 2026–2027;

6) a successful Latvian chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe and in the format of the Baltic-Nordic cooperation, and the Latvian presidency of the National Coordinators' Group of the European Union's Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region;

7) intensifying the use of development cooperation policy instruments, bearing in mind increased funding, especially to provide assistance to Ukraine, establishing a national development cooperation agency, and drawing up a Development Cooperation Policy Plan for 2024–2027;

8) sustainable support for Latvian businesses in entering new markets;

9) in the field of the diaspora policy—drawing up a Plan for Work with the Diaspora 2024–2026 and organising several important diaspora-related events—the World Latvian Economics and Innovations Forum (WLEIF), the Spotlight Latvia 2023 business conference, and the Forum of Latvian Professionals Working for International Organisations;

10) the capacity building of the Latvian Foreign Service and further optimisation of consular work initiated in earlier years, including the development of a new Consular Register and improvements to a Single Recording System for State Fees.

In order to implement its foreign policy tasks for 2023, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs will continue building lasting cooperation with public authorities and developing its current practice of successful cooperation with the non-governmental sector aimed at the full use of partners' potential.

Foreign policy and the European Union in the mid-term perspective

In recent years, the international environment has been displaying trends that mark the beginning of transformation processes in the international order, which both have an objective reason behind them and have been influenced by subjective motives. A move towards a new world order is under way. The world is now at a pivotal point characterised by unpredictability, fragmentation of the international environment, and an increase in confrontation at various levels, the apex of which is Russia's invasion of Ukraine. At the same time, we are witnessing an increasing confrontation of democracy and authoritarianism, rules-based global governance stuck in a holding pattern, the weakening of international rule of law, and disregard for the fundamental principles of democracy. Alternative interpretations of those principles are emerging.

Under such circumstances, considering that it is a small country, Latvia will have to pay increased attention to developments and provide its contribution by using various formats, so that as the result of global transformation processes, Latvia's place and role would be accurately defined and national interests observed in a balanced manner. The achievement of those objectives will call for strengthening of the foreign service, a closer coordination of foreign policy in general, and close collaboration with allies and like-minded countries.

One of the tasks in the medium term will be continued comprehensive support for Ukraine until the end of Russia's aggression, and provision of assistance to Ukraine in its reconstruction and implementation of reforms, as well as on its path to Euro-Atlantic integration. This process will be closely related to restraining Russian aggression. Latvia will stand up for a continuing policy of severe and sweeping sanctions against Russia and Belarus, as well as Russia's isolation in international organisations until Russia ceases its aggression against Ukraine and resumes compliance with the principles of international law and its international commitments. It will be vital to see that Russia is held accountable for its violations of international law and crimes against humanity. Looking forward, it would be of decisive importance to maintain the unity of the European Union's policy and a principles-based approach towards Russia, remaining aware that Russia's revanchism, aggressiveness, and unpredictability could persist over an extended period of time.

Russia's aggression towards Ukraine has accelerated Latvia's efforts to strengthen its security: Latvia ensures a lasting presence of essential NATO forces in its territory, by building, among other things, supporting infrastructure and providing for funds that are needed to cover defence expenditure in order to fully implement NATO's new deterrence posture, which envisages protection and defence of "every single inch of NATO territory". Development of NATO capabilities will have to be facilitated in response to various kinds of hybrid threats and NATO partnerships will have to be enhanced. Additionally, reinforcement of the European Union's defence capabilities will have to be complementary to the enhancement of NATO's capabilities. In the security context, a debate is expected to be launched on a new European security architecture.

Building even closer transatlantic relations with the United States of America, Canada, and the United Kingdom will be at the top of foreign policy priorities, in awareness

of the central role of that link in safeguarding Latvia's security and the need to ensure a permanent military presence of transatlantic partners.

An objective need for the strengthening of a rules-based international order will continue to increase, with it becoming a decisive factor in international relations. In that context, Latvia's candidacy for membership of the United Nations Security Council in 2026–2027 and potential election will offer additional opportunities to affect and influence global processes. Latvia will continue to advocate the need for reform of the United Nations, especially the UN Security Council.

New impetus will have to be given to the process of enlargement of the European Union while strengthening security and the rule of law in Europe. At the same time, Latvia will carefully evaluate the compliance of the candidate countries' actions with European Union values, especially support voiced for the external and security policy pursued by the organisation, which would be decisive in making a decision on the admittance of those countries to the European Union

Stability, security, and sustainable development in the regions geographically close to the European Union are vital for Latvia and the European Union as a whole; accordingly, Latvia's foreign policy will be focused on the promotion of cooperation and provision of support to the countries in those regions primarily through use of the European Neighbourhood Policy instruments. The Eastern Partnership Policy will have to be adapted to the new circumstances where its Member States have very different foreign policy directives, the strengthening of resilience of neighbouring countries will be highly important due to awareness that Russia will not relent in its destructive approach towards its neighbouring regions and countries. Taking this into account, it will be important to reinforce development cooperation instruments by ensuring the necessary financing.

In light of China's ever-increasing ambition to change the international order by offering various alternative models of security and global development, it would be important from the point of view of Latvia's interests to arrive at a common denominator regarding the most rational model for the European Union's cooperation with China. This model should be based on unity and ability, while protecting universal and fundamental values, to ensure the Union's economic independence and protect its economic interests, as well as on readiness to seek common denominators in matters in which China's involvement is essential.

Strengthening the European Union's internal and external effectiveness is a vital prerequisite for increasing its geopolitical role, and thereby, Latvia's potentialities to influence global processes. First, the strengthening of the European Union's energy independence through the adaptation of the gas market and electricity market to the new geopolitical situation has begun. Alternative routes of natural gas supply will have to be ensured, and a natural gas market with stable and affordable pricing established. The objective in the electric energy sector is to increase self-sufficiency, de-synchronise the electric power infrastructure from Russia and Belarus, and return to a competitive and stable electricity market price. Second, practical implementation of the Green Deal policy should continue in order to ensure Latvia's long-term economic competitiveness and growth potential, an important aspect of which is the creation and putting into practice of new technological solutions that would accelerate transition to climate neutrality by 2050. Third, stabilisation and recovery of the European Union economy should be ensured following economic upheavals caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and Russia's aggression against Ukraine, through developing an economy as still being open to global processes while remaining resilient, namely, one that is able to ensure autonomous resources or use alternative supply routes and countries of origin of raw materials. Fourth, focus should be placed on the development of regional connectivity, the completion of the *Rail Baltica* project, and intensifying the practical implementation of projects under the Three Seas Initiative.

Various regional cooperation formats will need to be more actively used by Latvia in pursuit of its interests, the priority being the deepening of the Baltic States' cooperation, a more

comprehensive/constructive use of the potential of the Baltic-Nordic format, including through further development of contacts with the United Kingdom. We also see as advantageous a closer cooperation of the Baltic-Nordic format with Poland in addressing security policy issues.

The Latvian Foreign Service will continue provision of permanent support for businesses in their entry to new and growing markets by opening new embassies, offering support in export promotion and attraction of investments, as well as facilitating the signing and expansion of the European Union's network of free trade agreements.

A major role will be played by the implementation of a coherent, dynamic and targeted diaspora policy, based on a coordinated cross-sectoral approach to a more active involvement of the diaspora in advancing matters on the international agenda that are important for Latvia. A special emphasis will be placed on the facilitation of self-organisation among diaspora youth and their involvement in diaspora-policy-related activities.

Russia's aggression against Ukraine

Ever since Russia invaded Ukraine, Latvia has been strongly condemning Russia's actions and took measures, on the one hand, to offer all possible assistance to Ukraine and, on the other hand, swung into comprehensive counteraction to Russian aggression by rolling out sweeping sanctions against Russia and by supporting Russia's international isolation. Latvia has been consistent in underlining that Ukraine's territorial integrity and sovereignty must be restored within its internationally recognised borders, and only Ukraine has the right to decide when, where, and on what conditions Russia's aggression could be considered to have been brought to an end. Latvia rejects exerting any pressure on Ukraine in this matter. At the same time, it should be kept in mind that the war could turn into a protracted conflict and stalemate; its dynamic is difficult to predict, and dealing with consequences could be long-lasting. The priority tasks of Latvia's Foreign Service are the provision of all possible assistance to Ukraine, sustaining a sanctions policy against Russia, calling Russia to account for its crimes of aggression, and demanding reparations.

Support provided by Latvia to Ukraine

From the first day of the war, Latvia has provided political, military, financial and humanitarian support, and in that, Latvia ranks among the countries with the highest support by share of its GDP. Support provided amounts to 0.93% of GDP, or more than EUR 314 million.

In the political sphere, the senior officials of Latvia—the President, the Speaker of the Saeima, ministers, and members of Parliament—have visited Ukraine to demonstrate solidarity. The Speaker of the Saeima together with her Estonian and Lithuanian counterparts were the first high-ranking foreign officials to visit Kyiv after Russia's invasion. The Saeima issued statements condemning Russia's military aggression, expressed support for Ukraine being granted EU candidate status, called for a no-fly zone to be established in the territory of Ukraine and, in light of the need to take measures to curb Russian aggression, recognised Russia as an aggressor state, did not recognise the results of the referendums rigged by Russia in the occupied Ukrainian territories, and called for holding accountable those who were guilty of international crimes perpetrated by Russia. Latvia was among the first to recognise Russian aggression and war crimes in Ukraine as genocide against the Ukrainian people.

Latvian diplomats strongly supported and fostered a united stance among partners on granting EU candidate status to Ukraine. Latvia will continue its support for Ukraine's eurointegration by focusing priorities on the strengthening of Ukraine's institutions, the fight against corruption, reinforcing the structure of internal security, national defence capabilities and

resilience, development of export capacity and a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area, as well as capacity-building to fight disinformation. An important factor for Ukraine's eurointegration is the welcoming of Ukraine's reform efforts in the General Affair Council's December conclusions on enlargement and the stabilisation and association process, including a call on the European Commission to prepare a roadmap for Ukraine in order to ease its access to the European Union's Single Market, as well as the European Commission's intention to provide an update on Ukraine in spring of 2023, which is important for demonstrating the dynamics of the process.

The Latvian Foreign Service stands up for the European Union's continuing financial assistance to Ukraine, helping to cover daily financial needs of public administration functions. Latvia welcomes the European Union's decision to allocate funds amounting to EUR 18 billion towards macro-financial support for Ukraine in 2023.

Latvia supports Ukraine's NATO membership aspirations. The decision on NATO's enlargement must have unanimous agreement of all the members of the Alliance.

In the military sector, even before Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Latvia had been providing military support for the Ukrainian armed forces and such support turned out to be instrumental in repelling the first big wave of the Russian assault. Further support included weapons, individual equipment, field rations, ammunition, antitank weapons, Stinger anti-aircraft missile systems, unmanned aerial vehicles, self-propelled howitzers, fuel, vehicles and other equipment, worth over EUR 310 million. Latvia financially supports NATO's Comprehensive Assistance Package for Ukraine, under which the Alliance is providing non-military support for Ukraine. As part of the package approved at the 2022 NATO Madrid Summit, equipment to ensure safe communication, fuel, food, medical equipment is being donated, as well as protective equipment against biological, chemical and nuclear weapons. Jointly with other European Union Member States, Latvia rolled out support measures as part of the European Peace Facility, coordinating military and non-military assistance and planning deliveries of EUR 3.1 billion. Timely supplies of weapons and equipment to Ukraine will be the main task of the allies in the nearest time frame, to achieve Ukraine's victory. To realise that goal, Latvia has joined the US-led Ukraine Defense Contact Group, or the Ramstein Format, in the framework of which, a coalition of about 50 countries is coordinating assistance provided to Ukraine, as well as planning for a long-term support strategy. Latvia has been actively advocating the establishment of a Military Assistance Mission under the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) to facilitate training of the Ukrainian Armed Forces personnel in the territory of the European Union Member States, and to provide support for reform of Ukraine's professional military education in the long term. In 2023, Latvia will take part in the mission by delivering several training courses for Ukrainian soldiers. In 2023, the European Peace Facility will be used for the coordination and deliveries of military and non-military assistance to Ukraine, and Latvia will make national contributions to the facility. In the NATO framework, the allies have agreed on a continued support for Ukraine in the longer term, including through the Comprehensive Assistance Package for Ukraine, to which Latvia is contributing financially.

To ensure provision of financial and humanitarian assistance to Ukraine, the Latvian Foreign Service assumed the central coordinating role in close cooperation with public authorities and members of the non-governmental sectors, providing the necessary consultations and participating practically in the implementation of projects to ensure that effectiveness of support is maximised. State budget funds of EUR 9.3 million have been allocated towards provision of macro-financial support, humanitarian aid and support for development cooperation, EUR 5 million of which have been channelled as a grant through the World Bank Group, EUR 0.6 million have been contributed to the United Nations agencies and the International Red Cross, as well as providing support for Ukraine's health sector (ambulance vehicles, stretchers, medicines and medical equipment) in the amount of EUR 1.66 million. Contributions of EUR 152,277 were also made to the solidarity fund of the European Union Aviation Safety Agency in

support of Ukraine and Moldova; the Public Broadcasting Company of Ukraine has been supported with EUR 0.56 million, and EUR 50,000 have been paid to the Grain from Ukraine initiative. Latvia has provided EUR 10 million in guarantees to back the World Bank loans with an eye toward uninterrupted functioning of the Ukrainian government.

In the framework of development cooperation policy, state-funded practical assistance projects were focused on the provision of much-needed humanitarian assistance. Alongside projects aimed at addressing the consequences of the war, implementation continued on projects in support of Ukraine's eurointegration. Latvia's assistance was directed at urgent reconstruction needs, support for Ukrainian media, implementation of various health and psychological rehabilitation programmes, good governance, business promotion, and education. The projects were carried out in partnership with the Baltic Centre of Media Excellence, Resource Centre for Women, Marta, Association, Entrepreneurs for Peace Foundation, the Viegli Palīdzēt volunteer movement, the Employers' Confederation of Latvia, Vaivari National Rehabilitation Centre, the University of Latvia, Riga Graduate School of Law, and Rēzekne Academy of Technologies.

More than 40,000 refugees have been registered in Latvia, and their stay is ensured with the help of not only central and local authorities but also civil society organisations. The invaluable contribution by the members and volunteers of the Want to Help Refugees movement deserve a special mention. The Saeima has adopted the Law on Support of the Ukrainian Civilians.

Civil society, private individuals and businesses have provided priceless support to Ukraine in both military and humanitarian sector. EUR 15 million donated through the ziedot.lv portal and EUR 2.5 million from Entrepreneurs for Peace have been directed towards technical and food supplies to the Ukrainian armed forces, including military hospitals, deliveries of humanitarian aid to almost all of Ukraine's regions, as well as assistance to Ukrainian refugees in Latvia. Donations from companies—IT equipment and ambulance vehicles—are also being delivered on a regular basis with support from Entrepreneurs for Peace. The Twitter Convoy campaign by the Agendum association is underway with weekly deliveries of cars; nearly 1,000 cars have already been sent to Ukraine. In addition, support for Ukraine is being offered at the level of Latvia's local governments, partners to Ukrainian municipalities and twinning cities.

In the future, alongside urgent humanitarian efforts and support for eurointegration aspirations, high importance will be attached to involvement in Ukraine's reconstruction. Through applying its development cooperation policy instruments, Latvia is going to invest EUR 5 million in Ukraine's reconstruction in 2023, with special attention being paid to urgent priorities—rebuilding critical infrastructure and housing, reviving business activity. Plans for Latvia's support are being devised together with businesses and the non-governmental sector; Latvia has also begun to identify potential donors from other countries to participate in implementation of renewal projects in Chernihiv. In 2023, the priority areas to assist Ukraine under development cooperation policy will be immediate support in the context of the war, including urgent reconstruction and support for people affected by the war and for reform and eurointegration processes.

Sanction policy against Russia

Tightening sanctions against Russia evolved into one of the key instruments designed to restrict the aggressor's capacity of financing and escalating hostilities and increasing the political and economic price it must pay for unleashing the war. Latvia's Foreign Service stands up for imposing sweeping sanctions on Russia. After Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the scope of sanctions has been considerably increased through nine rounds of restrictive measures. The European Union's sanctions have been imposed in close coordination with like-minded countries, including the United States, Canada and the United Kingdom, which enhances the effectiveness and impact of the sanctions. A number of countries, including Norway, Iceland, Montenegro, Albania, and North Macedonia, are gradually acceding to these measures.

In the energy sector, a prohibition has been imposed on imports from Russia of coal and oil, and a price cap has been set on the maritime transport of oil to third countries. A prohibition has also been imposed on new investments in the Russian energy and mining sector, and on exports to Russia of goods and technologies in the oil refining and gas sector. In the financial sector, sanctions target several banks, prohibiting transactions with them; the foreign assets of the Central Bank of Russia have been frozen. At the same time, access to the European Union's capital markets for certain Russian banks and companies is restricted, and a prohibition has been imposed on public financing and investment in Russia. In the transport sector, we see closure of the European Union's airspace to all Russian-owned and Russian-registered aircraft; Russian road transport operators are prohibited from entering the European Union, and the European Union's ports are closed to Russian vessels. Export goods and technology in the aviation, maritime and space industry to Russia is prohibited. Trade with Russia is subject to broader prohibitions, including a prohibition on exports to Russia of dual-use goods and technology for civilian users. There is also a prohibition on trade in civilian industry products that could contribute to the enhancement of military industries, for instance, electronics, semi-conductors, industrial chemical substances and explosives for civilian uses. A prohibition has been imposed on imports of iron and steel, wood, cement, gold and a number of other commodities from Russia to the European Union. And a prohibition has been imposed on exports of luxury goods to Russia. In the services sector, prohibitions apply to transactions with cryptocurrencies and to the provision of architectural, engineering, IT and legal consultancy services.

Members of Russia's ruling elite responsible for Russia's aggression against Ukraine have been targeted with individual restrictive measures including entry bans and freezing of their assets in the European Union. At this point, sanctions apply to 1386 individuals, including high-ranking Russian officials, members of the State Duma, the Federal Council and the State Security Council, and other people close to the ruling circles, such as oligarchs and those implementing the Kremlin propaganda. Sanctions have also been imposed on 171 legal entities. Restrictions have been set on the spread of Russia's propaganda through suspension of the broadcasting licenses of nine Kremlin propaganda outlets in the European Union.

While Russia continues its war in Ukraine and has occupied its land, Latvia maintains an unwavering position that a strong sanctions policy against Russia must remain in place. Sanctions must also remain in force after de-occupation of the Ukrainian territory until Russia has recognised Ukraine's independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity within its internationally recognised borders, and has paid for Ukraine's reconstruction. Work must continue together with partners on the coordination of sanctions, effective implementation of sanctions imposed until now, and prevention of attempts to circumvent sanctions. Latvia is prepared to further increase the sanctions pressure through extending or deepening their scope.

Alongside the above, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, being a coordinating authority in matters concerning sanctions, engages in explanatory work by providing answers to applications from private individuals and companies, organising seminars on sanction-related topics, publishing information in the Sanctions Section of the website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and disseminating a weekly newsletter on sanction-related updates. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs provides support for the Ministry of Justice in several proceedings in the European Court of Justice, defending together with the Council of the European Union, the legitimacy and validity of sanctions imposed by the European Union.

Latvia will also support reaching a European Union level legal solution so that frozen Russian assets could be channelled into funding Ukraine's reconstruction. It is essential to achieve a harmonised regulation across the European Union by criminalising serious violations of sanctions and to draw up a European Union level legal framework providing for liability of the providers of services and consultations who help circumvent sanctions by their actions.

Holding Russia accountable for the crime of aggression

Latvia underlines the need to hold Russia accountable for the act of aggression it has committed. Latvia was the first State to submit a declaration to the International Court of Justice requesting leave to intervene as a third party in the case of *Ukraine v. Russia* concerning Russia's deliberately abusive interpretation of the 1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide in order to create a pretext for the invasion of Ukraine. Latvia has also sought leave to intervene as a third party before the European Court of Human Rights in the case of *Ukraine v. Russia (X)*. In the said case, Ukraine claims that Russia's military aggression against Ukraine and invasion of the Ukrainian territory violates several provisions of the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms and its Protocols. Shortly after Russia's invasion of Ukraine, together with 37 other States Parties to the Rome Statute, Latvia lodged an application with the International Criminal Court requesting it to open an investigation into war crimes and crimes against humanity perpetrated in the territory of Ukraine. Latvia has contributed EUR 100,000 towards further work of the International Criminal Court, sent one expert to work at the International Criminal Court, and will send another expert from Latvia in 2023.

The Office of the Prosecutor General of Latvia has signed an agreement on joining the Joint Investigation Team. The aim of the Joint Investigation Team is to coordinate investigation and prosecution of crimes by ensuring exchange of information and support in obtaining evidence among the members of the team.

At the same time, it should be noted that the currently established mechanisms cannot exercise jurisdiction over the crime of aggression against Ukraine. Therefore, together with other like-minded States, Latvia calls for the establishment of an ad hoc special tribunal that would be competent to investigate the crime of aggression against Ukraine, thus closing the existing accountability gap. The President of Latvia has highlighted this need in his speech at the United Nations General Assembly, while the Latvian Foreign Minister together with the Foreign Ministers of Lithuania and Estonia made a statement on the need to establish such a tribunal at the European Union's Foreign Affairs Council. Latvia has accepted Ukraine's invitation to join the group of countries that would develop the concept and legal framework of the ad hoc special tribunal. In its statement, the Saeima has also called for establishing an ad hoc special tribunal to hold accountable those responsible for Russia aggression against Ukraine.

Revision of bilateral relations with Russia

Russia's aggression against Ukraine has radically changed bilateral relations between Latvia and Russia. For the most part, their bilateral cooperation has been suspended or reduced to the minimum required level. The Saeima and the Government have revised the bilateral agreements between Latvia and Russia, and are considering the sense in extending those agreements. A decision has been made to discontinue or denounce several agreements, including in the field of economic cooperation and culture, as well as concerning cross-border travel. The mechanism of regular political consultations between the Ministries of Foreign Affairs of Latvia and Russia has been put on hold; cooperation under the Inter-Governmental Commission and the cross-border cooperation programme as part of the European Neighbourhood Policy Instrument has been suspended. Russia's Consulates General in Daugavpils and Liepāja have been closed, as have the Consulate General of Latvia in Saint Petersburg, the Consulate in Pskov, and the Chancery in Kaliningrad, which had been part of the Consular Section of the Latvian Embassy in Moscow. The Latvian Embassy in Russia and the Russian Embassy in Latvia continue their work. Latvia expelled 16 citizens of Russia who had been working for the Russian diplomatic and consular mission in Latvia. Latvia's approach has been among the strictest of the European Union Member

States with regard to the issuance of visas to citizens of Russia. Since September 2022, for security reasons, several European Union Member States bordering Russia, including Latvia, have agreed on regional restrictions placed upon Russian citizens and their travel to the European Union. The entry is only allowed in individual cases for humanitarian reasons. The persona non grata list has been expanded in Latvia, and re-broadcasting of all Russian television channels has been banned in Latvia, as have propaganda websites. At the same time, with support from non-governmental organisations, Latvia has provided assistance to Russian media and media workers who had been forced to leave Russia. Those media workers are being given support so that they can continue their professional activities.

The role of Belarus in aggression against Ukraine

Since the fraudulent and unrecognised elections in 2020 and brutal crack-down on nonviolent resistance, the illegitimate regime of Belarus has grown fully dependent on Russia and provides direct support including military backing for Russia's invasion of Ukraine as well as making it possible to use the Belarusian territory for launching strikes on Ukraine. The increasing number of Russian troops in Belarus, the deployment of a joint grouping of troops in the territory of Belarus, and further integration of Belarus with Russia in the form of a Union at the expense of Belarusian sovereignty adds to continued instability and exacerbates the regional security situation. In response to support demonstrated by Belarus for Russian aggression, the European Union's sanctions against Belarus were expanded, also with active participation of Latvia. Restrictive measures were imposed on 22 high-ranking members of Belarusian military personnel, and restrictions were introduced in the trade of technologies used for the production or manufacturing of tobacco products, mineral fuels, bituminous substances and gaseous hydrocarbon products, potassium chloride, wood, cement, iron and steel, and rubber products. In the financial sector, five Belarusian banks have been disconnected from the SWIFT banking system and restrictions have been imposed on transactions with the Central Bank of Belarus. Further restrictions were also imposed on exports of dual-use goods and technology which might contribute to Belarus' military development. Cross-border cooperation programmes in the framework of the European Neighbourhood Policy Instrument have been suspended. Latvia continues advocating further international isolation of the Belarus regime. The Council of Europe has ceased contacts with Belarus, and the observer status of Belarus on the Council of the Baltic Sea States has been suspended. The participation of Belarus has been suspended in many sector-related international organisations and international formats of cooperation in science and sports.

The five rounds of sanctions imposed earlier in relation to the violations of human rights and international law, and for hybrid attacks remain in force. At the bilateral level, Latvia continues a course towards a further narrowing of relations through denouncement and suspension of several bilateral agreements. Latvia condemns repressions by the Lukashenko regime against the Belarusian civil society and the media, as well as supporting the efforts of the Belarusian society to establish a democratic, independent, sovereign, prosperous, and stable Belarus. Latvia maintains contacts with members of the democratic opposition in exile. Latvia will continue its support for the Belarusian civil society, especially youth and students, as well as participation in the European Union's assistance programme in solidarity with the Belarusian civil society, EU4Belarus - SALT, which offers scholarships for studies at Latvia's universities.

The hybrid attack launched by the Lukashenko regime in 2021 at the European Union border has not ceased. Organised groups of third country nationals are still being encountered at the Latvian-Belarusian border; these people, with support from Belarusian authorities, are attempting to enter Latvia. Latvia will continue to protect its national border, which is also the European Union's external border, as well as opposing and repelling any other manifestations of a hybrid attack.

International security issues and transatlantic relations

Since Russia's aggression, the regional and global security environment has been undergoing significant change. Russia has, in fact, demolished the current European security architecture and seriously undermined the foundation of the international security environment. At the present stage, the main tasks for Latvia, our partners and allies in NATO and the European Union, are the provision of support to Ukraine and the implementation of measures to strengthen security in a broader context, including Latvia's security. At the same time, it should be jointly considered how to reinforce and, where necessary, improve and restore the foundations of international and European security architecture. In this context, the decisions of the Madrid Summit on the approval of a new Strategic Concept and the strengthening of deterrence and defence of the Alliance's eastern flank, and the adoption of the European Union's Strategic Compass were of special importance in 2022.

From Madrid to Vilnius: deterrence and defence of the Alliance's eastern flank

In response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, a significant political message was sent by the strengthening of the NATO enhanced Forward Presence battlegroup deployed in Latvia. Canada sent additional troops to Latvia and increased its presence in Headquarters of Multinational Division North. Spain sent additional troops and deployed a medium range anti-aircraft unit. Italy, too, sent more personnel to Latvia. Alongside the enhanced Forward Presence battlegroup, the United States and Denmark are also raising the number of their military personnel and equipment in Latvia. In June, Denmark announced its decision to extend the presence of its battalion in Latvia until March 2023. By those measures, NATO Allies are demonstrating their solidarity and preparedness to reinforce security in the Baltic region.

Russia's aggression made NATO take urgent measures to enhance its deterrence and defence posture, especially concerning the Alliance's eastern flank. At the extraordinary meeting of NATO Heads of State and Government in Brussels in March 2022, a decision was adopted on the establishment of four new NATO enhanced Forward Presence battlegroups in Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania, and Slovakia in addition to four battlegroups in the Baltic States and Poland. This is fortifying the Alliance's defences from the Baltic to the Black Sea.

The previous scale of NATO presence and security solutions in the Baltic States are no longer sufficient. In view of that, decisions taken at the NATO Madrid Summit reflect a fundamental change in the Alliance's approach to the defence of the Allied territories by setting an ambition of forward defence. This envisages transition from "deterrence by reinforcement" to "deterrence by denial", by deploying additional robust in-place combat-ready forces and prepositioned equipment thereby enhancing NATO's ability to quickly reinforce and provide combat-credible defence. Those changes will complement current military adaptation and the development of new defence plans and modernisation of force structure that has been started, as well as further development of defence capabilities. With a view to implementing the decisions, the increase of the Allied forces both in terms of quantity and quality, and prepositioned military equipment and war reserve stock in the east of the Alliance will be vitally important in 2023 and the coming years.

The Baltic States promoted, in a concerted manner, the collective commitment of the allies to scaling up the existing battlegroups in the Baltics to brigade-size units. This includes brigade-level command and control elements, and the necessary prepositioned weapons and ammunition.

The commitment of the Ministers of Defence of Latvia and Canada was enshrined in a declaration on the further development of NATO's enhanced Forward Presence battlegroup in Latvia. Canada has committed to continuing its leadership of the NATO enhanced Forward Presence battlegroup in Latvia, and has agreed to cooperate with NATO member states in the co-financing of the required infrastructure to ensure the further strengthening of the Alliance's deterrence and defence capabilities. Latvia expects progress with the establishment of a brigade-level battlegroup before the next NATO Summit in Vilnius in 2023.

Latvia will increase the host nation support and continue to invest in defence. There are plans to increase defence expenditure to up to 3% of GDP by 2027 and invest in the development of military infrastructure. Allies at the Madrid Summit reaffirmed the commitment to spending at least 2 % of GDP on defence by 2024. The war unleashed by Russia, the need to support Ukraine has only encouraged a number of Allies to invest more resources towards defence. In this respect, a positive mention should be made of the historic turning point (*Zeitenwende*) in Germany's foreign and defence policy, in view of the country's essential role in Europe's security.

The new strategic concept

Interests of Latvia and its allies lie in sustainable long-term security solutions. In order to ensure the Alliance's conformity with the challenges and needs of the coming decade, at the NATO Summit in Madrid, the allies adopted a new NATO Strategic Concept. The concept reaffirmed collective defence as NATO's core task—no-one should doubt delivery on commitments under Article 5 of the Washington Treaty, should the need arise. The concept offers guidance on how NATO could adapt to the altered security environment in the world, as well as mapping out the core tasks for the Alliance—to strengthen deterrence and defence, crisis prevention and management, as well as cooperative security. Russia has been recognised as the most significant and direct threat to the Euro-Atlantic security. We also face the persistent threat of terrorism. The Concept provides explanations of challenges such as China's influence on international security, the risks caused by the advance of authoritarianism, the impact of emerging technologies, and various hybrid threats. The importance of NATO partnerships and interconnection in global processes has been underlined—with special focus on the partnership with the European Union. To highlight the importance of dialogue and cooperation with Indo-Pacific partners, the leaders of Australia, Japan, New Zealand and South Korea attended the NATO Madrid Summit for the first time. Latvia is actively engaged in NATO efforts to develop new technologies in order to ensure innovations for the needs of contemporary defence.

During the summit, Latvia joined the newly established NATO Innovation Fund and confirmed that one of the testing centres of the NATO Defence Innovation Accelerator for the North Atlantic (DIANA) would be located in Latvia. Latvia signed a partnership agreement for the Innovation Fund, and Latvia's startups will be called upon to develop and submit project applications for dual-use solutions in the coming years thus making use of the funding offered. The Test Centre located in Latvia will get involved in dealing with the challenges defined in the Defence Innovation Accelerator strategy.

NATO enlargement and partnerships

The historic decisions of Finland and Sweden to apply for NATO membership are important for Latvia's security. The accession of these two countries will contribute considerably to fostering of security in the Baltic Sea region, NATO's eastern flank and across the Alliance. The Saeima has already ratified the Accession Protocols for Finland and Sweden. In 2023, Latvia will support consultations and work on practical preparation undertaken by the two countries in becoming full members.

Since Russia's invasion of Ukraine, NATO has reviewed its cooperation with partner countries. Special attention is devoted to Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, and Moldova. Partnerships have become more strategic and concrete, more adapted to the specific needs and political context of each country. Latvia supports the strengthening of the partnership policy and the allocation of additional financing for its implementation. Partnerships forms a vital and indispensable instrument that advances the security of the entire Euro-Atlantic space while supporting cooperative security, one of the NATO's three core tasks.

Latvia supports NATO's Open Door Policy and will continue supporting the democratic countries which are willing to follow the course of Euro-Atlantic integration.

Transatlantic relations

Russia's aggression against Ukraine has increased the central role of transatlantic cooperation in Latvia's foreign and security policy. The presence of transatlantic allies in the Baltic region is an indispensable element of deterrence and defence in the context of European security. Latvia's priorities in cooperation with the United States of America is the enhancement of its military presence in the region, ensuring the U.S. financial support for the development of Latvia's military capabilities, promotion of cooperation in the digital and technologies sector, as well as a more active involvement of the United States of America in the Three Seas Initiative. In cooperation with Canada, alongside central topics in the field of security and defence, a closer economic development will be developed, especially in the areas of investments and high technologies, and cooperation for the strengthening of the United Nations' Women, Peace and Security agenda.

Visits to Latvia by the U.S. Secretary of State and the Defence Secretary, as well as the Prime Minister and the Minister for Defence of Canada in the wake of Russia's invasion of Ukraine is an additional confirmation of the Allied solidarity and resolve to protect Latvia's security. The United States of America has approved plans for enhancing its military presence in the Baltic States, which envisages U.S. troops and military equipment units staying in Latvia without interruptions, in a rotational order. In Fiscal Year 2022, the U.S. government provided Latvia with USD 200 million in security assistance and security cooperation funding, including USD 160.7 million in Foreign Military Financing (FMF) to strengthen Latvian security and military interoperability. Latvia will also be able to benefit from the U.S. Foreign Military Financing package for countries that have provided significant assistance to Ukraine. The funding granted is to be spent on the strengthening of the coastal defence capabilities and acquisition of a medium-range air defence system and rocket artillery systems. The United States of America has allocated USD 225 million under the Baltic Security Initiative for 2023.

Latvia continued providing its contribution towards the strengthening of democratic values by taking part in the second Summit for Democracy, hosted by the United States of America, especially in the field of information integrity and media freedom, in the context of which Latvia co-chaired the Information Integrity Cohort, together with Canada and the U.S. Alliance for Securing Democracy.

From Latvia's perspective, the EU-U.S. Trade and Technology Council has an essential role to play in the strengthening of transatlantic relations and a positive trade agenda. As part of the Council's activities, in response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, close cooperation took place in 2022 in the matters of sanctions-related export restrictions and in countering Russia's disinformation. From Latvia's point of view, it is essential to use the Council's format to promote investments and trade with Ukraine in 2023, as well. Important areas of cooperation are the strengthening and diversification of supply chains, new technologies, transition to an environmentally-friendly economy, as well as promotion of security and competitiveness of 5G/6G telecommunications networks.

The European Union's Strategic Compass

As the integration of the European Union continues and grows deeper, the European Union's role is also increasing in the Common foreign and defence policy and on the global arena. To map out these growth vectors for the future, the European Union's Strategic Compass for Security and Defence was approved in March 2022. The document sets out the political framework and specific tasks for the next decade with regard to the European Union's ability to respond to security challenges and crises, including the need to develop the Member States' capabilities and to attract resources for investments in the military industry. In the coming years, it is vital for Latvia that investments be made in the strengthening of defence capabilities on the condition that this complements the development of NATO's capabilities. It is important for work to continue on the facilitation of military mobility and the implementation of the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) projects in the areas of military mobility, mine-sweeping and cyber security. It is vital for Latvia that due attention is devoted to building resilience in the field of hybrid security, including cyber security and fighting disinformation. The European Union must continue providing strong support for the Eastern Partnership countries to strengthen their resilience, as well as promoting the European Union's strategic partnership with NATO.

The arms control process

The erosion of the arms control system was already apparent before the war unleashed by Russia on Ukraine. Russia had been ignoring international confidence- and security-building instruments and related commitments for quite some time. Before the invasion of Ukraine, Russia and Belarus also refused to provide their considerations on risk-reduction procedures proposed by the Baltic States and Ukraine as part of the OSCE Vienna Document in relation to joint large scale military exercise held by the two countries near the Ukrainian border. Russia's utter disregard for international commitments and obligations was also reaffirmed by the results of the Tenth Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, when the outcome document was not adopted: although all the other States parties had been able to reach a consensus, Russia objected to formulations concerning nuclear safety in Ukraine.

A negative trend in the field of arms control manifests in North Korea's continued implementation of its nuclear programme, the rising number of missile tests, and changes to its nuclear doctrine, thereby lowering the nuclear threshold. Iran is still evading delivery on its commitments in the area of non-proliferation, including the ever-reducing opportunity to achieve a solution in international negotiations on the revival of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action. China continues to develop its Strategic Armament Systems, while avoiding full participation in arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation mechanisms. Latvia, together with allies and like-minded countries, reaffirms that China should undertake the responsibilities pertinent to a nuclear state and fully engage in arms control mechanisms. Latvia highlighted the issue during the Tenth Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference.

Latvia, together with allies and like-minded countries, will further underline the issue of arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and the significance of the existing mechanisms to safeguard international and national security. Together with allies, Latvia will promote awareness that China should assume greater responsibility in matters of arms control. Together with other European Union Member States, Latvia will call on Iran and North Korea to comply with international rules in the field of arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, including relevant resolutions of the United Nations Security Council with a special emphasis on the need for a meaningful cooperation with the International Atomic Energy Agency. In the context of regional security, in the OSCE format,

Latvia will call for preserving mutual confidence- and security-building measures and urge Russia and Belarus to return to full compliance with those commitments with the aim of improving the security situation in Europe.

Safeguarding of international law and the rule of law

In recent years, the international environment clearly displayed a crisis of multilateralism and trends indicate the weakening of international law, unsubstantiated interpretations of the provisions of international law, and some countries coming up with alternative models of world order. In a more distant perspective, and in view of China's growing assertiveness in offering various alternative initiatives, increasingly intensive discussions are expected on the future of the international system. From Latvia's perspective, there is no credible alternative to the United Nations system at this point in time; therefore, an essential task is to fully restore the international rule of law, effective multilateralism and improved functioning and credibility of international organisations. Russia's invasion of Ukraine has highlighted limits in the abilities of international organisations, including reluctance of separate member states to take action in countering an aggressor state, thereby weakening the international system even further.

Latvia sees several ways to make its contribution. It is of primary relevance to end Russia's aggression by continued advocacy of the need to expand Russia's international isolation and consistently working with countries that are still adopting ambiguous stances with regard to Russia's invasion of Ukraine. In the long term, and in view of the shortfalls spotlighted by the Russian aggression, Latvia will continue actively standing up for reforms of the United Nations Security Council, participating in international missions, and the implementation of development cooperation policy. Latvia's candidacy to the seat of a non-permanent member of the United Nations Security Council for the term of 2026-2027 will represent another opportunity for Latvia to contribute to the strengthening of a rules-based international order.

International isolation and condemnation of Russia

Latvia, alongside like-minded countries, has consistently and in a systematic manner worked towards the isolation of Russia and Belarus from international organisations. Russia has been expelled from the Council of Europe, the Council of the Baltic Sea States, and the World Tourism Organisation. Russia's membership or observer status has been suspended in the United Nations Human Rights Council, the Organisation of American States, the OECD, the European Organisation for Nuclear Research, the Baltic Marine Environment Protection Commission, the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference, VASAB (the Baltic Sea States Spatial Planning Initiative), and the European Conference of Postal and Telecommunications Administrations. Continued work is underway on measures isolating Russia in the United Nations, the OSCE, the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, the World Trade Organisation, the International Labour Organisation, and a number of United Nations agencies and committees, for instance, UNESCO, and the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe. The level of Russia's credibility and prestige in international organisations has been rapidly decreasing, and Russia's representatives have lost their long-standing posts in several institutions of the UN system.

In the formats of member states of international organisation, Latvia will continue standing up for maintaining international pressure on Russia and will bring to the forefront the issue of holding Russia accountable for its crimes of aggression and war crimes in Ukraine. Latvia has been one of the leading countries to help facilitate broad support for the initiatives of the United Nations General Assembly in relation to Russia's aggression against Ukraine. This year, three resolutions

condemning aggression against Ukraine and its humanitarian consequences as well as reaffirming support for Ukraine's territorial integrity following the illegal and illegitimate annexation of Ukrainian territories by Russia have been adopted with an overwhelming majority of the member states votes. The United Nations General Assembly also decided to suspend Russia's rights of membership of the United Nations Human Rights Council and adopted a resolution to further remedy and reparation for aggression against Ukraine. Due to persistence of Latvian diplomats, the United Nations Human Rights Council adopted a resolution on a systematic monitoring of human rights violations in Russia. Dialogue with international partners in other regions must be continued to explain the true causes of Russia's war in Ukraine and its global consequences.

Priorities for presidency of the Council of Europe

Latvia will assume the Presidency of the Council of Europe from May to November 2023, taking it over from Iceland. During the six-month Presidency, the Minister of Foreign Affairs will chair the work of the Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers. In Latvia's opinion, the impact of the Council of Europe in the pursuit of democratic values has to be seriously reconsidered, and the organisation's visibility should be strengthened. It is also essential to envisage the involvement of the Council of Europe in providing support to Ukraine. These topics will be relevant at the upcoming Council of Europe's Summit in Reykjavik in 2023, which coincides with the launch of the Latvian Presidency. The Latvian Presidency will have to ensure implementation of agreements reached at the summit and proceed with the initiatives of the previous presidencies.

During its Presidency, Latvia would like to focus on three priority lines of action on the Council's agenda. First, the strengthening of democracy and the rule of law in Europe, especially through advancing the authority of the European Court of Human Rights and effective enforcement of its judgments in member States. A major challenge in this context is the execution of the Court's judgments in Russia after its cessation of membership in the Council of Europe. Second, the promotion of freedom of expression, safety of journalists, and the digital agenda of the Council of Europe. The Council of Europe and its member States need to pay more attention to the protection of media freedom and fighting disinformation to reduce the threat to democracy in Europe. As part of its Presidency, Latvia, at the international level, will bring to the fore the topics of the safety of journalists in wartime conditions, the protection of journalists in the digital environment, media literacy and resilience to disinformation. Third, the Council of Europe must become more open to society and more inclusive, and engage with the civil society and youth to a greater extent. Latvia will support the current reform process in the organisation to considerably improve communication, which would raise awareness among the general public of the importance of the Council of Europe's monitoring mechanisms in the protection of human rights.

In keeping with those priorities, Latvia will touch upon a number of additional issues on the Council's agenda, and the competent government institutions and non-governmental partners of Latvia will have the opportunity to highlight Latvia's best practices at the conferences and events organised by the Presidency. The delegation of the Saeima to the Council of Europe's Parliamentary Assembly, the delegation of the Latvian Association of Local and Regional Governments to the Council of Europe's Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, and participation of the country's senior officials will be playing a major role in the success of Latvia's Presidency.

Candidacy for a seat of a non-permanent member in the United Nations Security Council

In the coming years, a joint task of the government will be to ensure Latvia's successful election to United Nations Security Council in 2025 for the term 2026-2027. Candidacy for a non-

permanent member's seat in the United Nations Security Council clearly demonstrates Latvia's commitment in strengthening the system of international law through action and deeds, which is of existential importance for smaller states like Latvia. This is also confirmation for Latvia's strategic and like-minded partners about our readiness to protect democratic values and interests in times when a rules-based international order is being relentlessly challenged. As a member of the United Nations Security Council, Latvia will gain the opportunity to reinforce the perspectives and positions of the democratic world in the global arena. Latvia will take part in decision-making on global security matters, thereby directly also strengthening Latvia's sovereignty and the region's security, which is of special importance in the medium-term perspective. This is yet another opportunity for boosting of Latvia's capacity building in foreign policy.

Our neighbours—Estonia and Lithuania—have already held seats in the United Nations security Council proving by their contribution that smaller countries can successfully influence the Security Council's work. Lithuania was a member of the United Nations Security Council in 2014–2015, when Russia annexed the Crimea and occupied Ukraine's eastern regions; during its term in office in 2020 and 2021, Estonia advanced the issues related to Ukraine, Belarus and cyber security on the Security Council's agenda. Likewise, the examples of Norway, Ireland and others are proof of the ability of smaller countries to influence the agenda and shape international opinion.

To raise the country's profile internationally and ensure necessary support from at least 129 United Nations member states for Latvia's candidacy, we must reach out to countries in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Caribbean. The candidacy campaign serves as a valuable tool for drawing attention to Russian aggression and its violations of international law.

Latvia's campaign for election to the United Nations Security Council will be officially launched in the second part of 2023. Thematic directions for Latvia's campaign have been formulated in the areas in which Latvia has international credibility. In international organisations, alongside international law, democracy and resilience, Latvia has been regularly highlighting the topics of disinformation and media literacy, women's and girls' rights and empowerment, digital solutions and sustainable development. Latvia's non-governmental sector offered substantial contributions to the formulation of thematic directions.

The need for UN reforms

In Latvia's view, no credible or preferable alternative to the United Nations system can be envisioned in the foreseeable future; therefore, the rules-based international order must be strengthened through meaningful reform processes, reform of the Security Council in particular. The fact that Russia abuses the United Nations as a platform for its agenda and by using its rights of veto at the Security Council discredits and interferes with the Council's work, only affirms the urgency of this challenge.

The permanent members of the Security Council must take decisive action in situations involving genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes, on which the use of veto is unacceptable. Latvia also stands up for pragmatic solutions to improve the Security Council's working methods. This includes the transparency and effectiveness of the Council's work and explaining the reasons behind its decisions. At the same time, understanding that in the current situation it is not possible to deprive a permanent member of the Security Council of its veto rights, Latvia sees as a priority development of initiatives that would restrict the use of the veto in the cases of genocide and the crimes of war and aggression. Latvia will continue work on the issues of the United Nations reform in a group of like-minded countries, the Accountability, Coherence and Transparency Group, and actively expressing its position in the Intergovernmental Negotiations Framework (IGN) on the United Nations Security Council reform. Latvia will advocate for all regions to be fairly represented on the Security Council, including the need to

envisage additional representation for Eastern Europe, Africa, Latin America, and small island states.

Latvia was among the countries that launched an initiative to organise a debate at the United Nations General Assembly on occasions when a permanent member is using its veto rights at the Security Council. As the result of the initiative, the role of the General Assembly has increased in the matters of peace and security. Thereby, the role of all United Nations member states, both large and small, is increasing in the organisation's work. This makes it possible to advance resolutions in support of Ukraine.

Participation in international missions

With its participation in international missions, Latvia does not only make a contribution to the promotion of peace and security, but also strengthens the mechanisms and culture of international cooperation, including support for its allies and partners, that are also supporting Latvia. In addition, participation raises Latvia's profile around the world and offers our delegates the chance to gain highly valuable experience. In this light, also in the years ahead, Latvia will continue to steadily develop its capacity to participate in international missions.

In 2022, as part of multilateral cooperation, Latvia contributed to nine international missions and operations of the European Union, NATO, and the United Nations missions and operations in Ukraine, Georgia, Kosovo, Mali, Iraq, the Middle East, and the Mediterranean. Latvia is taking part with six civilian experts in the European Union Advisory Mission Ukraine (EUAM Ukraine), tasked with the coordination of the humanitarian effort and refugee flows and providing support in the documenting Russia's war crimes in Ukraine. Latvia continued its participation in the NATO-led international operation (KFOR) in Kosovo with a light infantry company, which is the largest Latvian contingent in international operations. Latvia continued to take part in the European Union's naval operation in the Mediterranean (EUNAVFOR MED IRINI) with two representatives. In different-sized units, Latvian soldiers served on the NATO mission in Iraq (NMI). Latvia participates with one representative in the mission of the United Nations Truce Supervision Organisation (UNTSO) in Israel, and support also continues for the Operation Inherent Resolve of the Global Coalition to defeat ISIL. Six Latvian civilian experts are working on the European Union Monitoring Mission Georgia (EUMM Georgia). Following an agreement with Armenia and Azerbaijan, in October, experts from EUMM Georgia took up short-term observation duties along the Armenia-Azerbaijan border. With security conditions in Mali deteriorating considerably, the European Union took a decision on the temporary suspension of training operations by the European Union Training Mission in Mali (EUTM Mali), therefore, Latvia's participation in that mission and in the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) were suspended. Latvia's military representative who worked also returned to Latvia.

In 2023, Latvia will nominate additional civilian experts for participation in the European Union's civilian missions in Ukraine and Georgia, as well as will support the establishment of the European Union's civilian mission in Armenia. The participation of military personnel of the National Armed Forces of Latvia will continue in NATO's KFOR, EUNAVFOR MED IRINI, Inherent Resolve, UNTSO, and NATO mission in Iraq (NMI). Latvia plans its participation in the European Union Assistance Mission in support of Ukraine (EUMAM Ukraine) throughout 2023.

Development cooperation

Funding for development cooperation policy administered by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs reached the amount of EUR 1.36 million, which made it possible not only increase support for Ukraine, but also effectively strengthened Latvia's practical involvement in addressing global challenges. Assistance continued to countries in the Eastern Partnership region, Central Asia, and Africa in accordance with projects included in the Development Cooperation Policy Plan for 2021–

2023. 2022 saw the implementation of 39 projects, with a special focus on support projects in Ukraine in order to help deal with the consequences of war (37% of all development cooperation projects). In line with Latvia's development cooperation priorities, 39% of development cooperation projects implemented by Latvia contribute to the promotion of peace, and the strengthening of efficient, responsible and inclusive institutions, 18% to quality education, 17% to the promotion of gender equality, 14% to economic growth, and 9% to climate action. Digitalisation, as Latvia's cross-cutting priority, was an element in one fourth of the supported projects. For the first time, Latvia carried out projects in Africa, Namibia and Zambia, aimed at promoting women's entrepreneurship. The foreign service ensured the link between Latvia's bilateral development cooperation activities with the activities of other donors, promoting the sustainability, effectiveness and visibility of support provided by Latvia, especially in the field of good governance, including training for young professionals, improvements to provision of public services and capacity building in audit authorities.

The Development Cooperation Agency of Latvia, established under the guidance of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, began its work in 2022, adding to the functions of the Central Finance and Contract Agency. The core task of the new agency is to promote participation of the implementers of Latvia's development cooperation in projects financed by international assistance providers from foreign countries. The first pilot project coordinated by the agency has been launched to share Latvia's expertise with Uzbekistan in the field of good governance. The agency is currently undergoing the accreditation process and, when this is complete, Latvia will be able to get directly involved in the implementation as lead partner in projects financed by the European Union.

A large number of non-governmental partners were involved in the implementation of Latvia's development cooperation, including Centre MARTA, Riga TechGirls, Riga Graduate School of Law, #esiLV movement, the Latvian Rural Forum, SIA SunGIS, the Social Entrepreneurship Association, the Baltic Human Rights Society, and the Latvian Platform for Development Cooperation. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has supported the associations, the Latvian Platform for Development Cooperation and the Latvian Association of Local and Regional Governments, thereby facilitating international-scale involvement of Latvian civil society in the development cooperation processes and its policy planning.

In 2023, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs will continue developing its Development Cooperation Policy sector in a systemic manner. With an increased bilateral funding allocated in the Law on Medium Term Budget it will be possible to raise the number of projects to be carried out in 2023 as well, including a broader-scale engagement on the African continent. One of major tasks for 2023 will also be the preparation of a Development Cooperation Policy Plan for 2024–2027.

Economic processes and Latvia's interests

Russia's aggression against Ukraine and the consequences of the global pandemic are having a negative effect on the development of the world economy, creating risks of economic downturn. Disruptions in global supply chains have compelled businesses to change strategies and give up the principle of "no warehousing", seek suppliers located geographically closer and build larger stocks of goods and raw materials. At the same time, the reduced purchasing capacity and increasing production costs due to soaring energy prices, as well as the need for Latvian businesses to seek new markets for raw material imports, especially in the sectors of metal working, food processing, construction and timber industry, which while creating conditions favourable for a rising inflation rate, have been decreasing the overall economic activity in the Baltic region and demand for goods and services produced in Latvia, which in turn leads to

decrease in exports and gross domestic product. Solutions to this predicament must be sought at the global, European Union, and national level, and their implementation could have both a short-term and long-term character, in view of global economic processes. Latvia must make use of the opportunities offered by the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and development (OECD), Latvia's interests lie in the strengthening of the European Union's economic independence through shaping a sustainable energy policy, implementation of the policy of climate neutrality, strengthening the single market, reinforcing sector-related resilience, further digitalisation and the development of connectivity, the use of effective instruments of recovery, and building a network of free trade agreements.

Towards a sustainable energy policy

One of the most consequential steps taken by the European Union to strengthen its resilience was its response to Russia's energy blackmail and coercion in the form of ignoring long-term contracts and unilaterally reducing or terminating pipeline gas supplies to almost all Member States of the European Union. Russia's actions spurred the European Union into giving up Russia's energy resources, replacing them with imports of more diverse energy resources from reliable partners and focusing more on the security of critical infrastructure.

While mainly importing natural gas from Russia, Latvia began working well in advance with regional partners on creating an infrastructure that could ensure alternative supply routes. A common gas market for Latvia, Estonia, Lithuania and Finland, which complies with the European Union legislation, has been functioning since the beginning of 2020. The capacity of the Latvia-Lithuania gas interconnector has been increased due to funding released by the European Union budget. As a result, Latvia has succeeded in successfully diversifying and re-focussing on other suppliers, taking as well the decision on banning imports of Russian gas as from 1 January 2023. In the short term, the liquefied gas terminals in the ports of Klaipeda in Lithuania and Inko in Finland serve as alternative supply routes for Latvia and the region as a whole. Latvia has also made use of the possibility, as provided for in the European Union Regulation on measures to safeguard the security of the natural gas supply, to sign bilateral solidarity agreements with Lithuania and Estonia, and these have been ratified at the Saeima.

For the European Union Member States to be prepared in the best way possible for the winter season with the largest possible reserves of natural gas, a decision was made to ensure that gas storage facilities are filled at least to a 90% target. As the result of decisions adopted at the European Union level, the fill-up of the Inčukalns Underground Gas Storage Facility is sufficient to ensure Latvia's demand for the winter season of 2022/2023. The European Union Member States have achieved an agreement on gas economy measures aimed at reducing the overall consumption by 15%. As the result of austerity measures, the share of Russia's pipeline gas in the European Union market has been reduced from 40% to 9% before the 2022/2023 heating season. In December 2022, at the Transport, Telecommunications and Energy Council, EU energy ministers reached an agreement on a natural gas market correction mechanism which provides for setting a safety ceiling on natural gas wholesale price in the European Union, in case a certain price level is exceeded. An agreement was also achieved on two regulations—on accelerating the permit-granting process and the deployment of renewable energy projects, and on enhancing solidarity through better coordination of joint purchases of gas by the European Union. In 2023, Member States have to agree on the measures and amounts of natural gas purchases ahead of the next heating season, that of 2023/2024, as well as seeking further solutions to reducing the high energy prices in the European Union while retaining safety of natural gas supplies.

Although consumers are free to choose their electricity provider and the best price offer, given the fact that electric power prices are being largely influenced by the price of natural gas, the current model of the electricity market is no longer functioning in the interests of consumers, nor

does it benefit from the comparatively low price of renewable resources. Accordingly, a debate has been launched on the optimisation of the electricity market design, adaptation and reform. In Latvia's opinion, for this debate to continue, a comprehensive impact assessment is needed as a compulsory precondition for a balanced decision. It is important for Latvia that, in future, the electric power market design is adjusted to the large share of renewable energy and mechanisms are introduced to help respond better to a dramatic increase in the price of one of the resources. We expect the assessment on those matters to be provided in 2023 so that discussions could begin on a future market model.

The synchronisation of the Baltic States' electricity grid with the Continental European Network by the end of 2025 will remain a priority with a view to fully eliminating our energy dependence on Russia. Latvia is working together with Estonia on a larger renewable energy project—the ELWIND offshore wind farm. The European Commission has assigned this project the status of a renewable resource cross-border project, which will make it easier to mobilise funding from the EU budget.

Climate neutrality policy

In the context of energy supply security and the accessibility of electric power, climate change and its mitigation are among the top policy priorities, especially in the context of safety of energy supplies and the accessibility of electric power, for the European Union and Latvia in the longer term. Climate change, extreme weather conditions and the rising global sea levels pose an inordinate risk to the welfare, life space and security of people in the world, in the European Union and also in Latvia. Giving up fossil fuels and building a climate neutral economy will make it possible to reduce the dependency of the European Union and Latvia on energy imports, thereby enhancing our independence.

Latvia supports the European Union's common targets of reducing greenhouse gas emissions at least by 55% by 2030, and achieving climate neutrality no later than by 2050. To make that happen, ambitious climate policy measures will have to be put in place in all the sectors of the economy, including the reduction of emissions of harmful pollutants and greenhouse gases and the increase of their removal, while ensuring pursuit of the principles of sustainability and environmental and protection of nature.

In 2022, the Council of the European Union agreed on the majority of legislation related to the European Green Deal, and consultations have begun with the European Parliament on solutions acceptable to both the institutions. Latvia believes that considerable progress has already been achieved in this area, and will contribute to the finalisation of the consultation process between the European Union institutions on the European Green Deal legislation. In those consultations, it is important for Latvia that a balance be found between the ambitions concerning the climate change mitigation target, the possibilities of using local renewable energy resources, and economic growth.

In November 2022, Sharm el-Sheikh in Egypt hosted the 27th Conference of Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP27). Although the conference achieved agreement on the establishment of a new fund with the aim of addressing loss and damage associated with the adverse effects of climate change in the most vulnerable countries, a noteworthy progress has not been achieved and the decisions taken concerning the mitigation of climate change are not sufficient to achieve the target set out in the Paris Agreement to limit global warming to 1.5°C. During the conference in Dubai, the United Arab Emirates, in 2023, it would be vital to agree on more ambitious climate change mitigation targets, as well as to conclude the first assessment of progress towards achieving the Paris Agreement's long-term goals.

Implementation of the European Union Recovery Instrument and strengthening the Single Market

2022 saw continued implementation of the European Union Recovery Instrument. One of its components is the Recovery and Resilience Facility, which makes it possible to invest EUR 723.8 billion to help Member States to overcome the economic crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Latvia is planning to receive a total of EUR 1.8 billion for investments from the Recovery and Resilience Facility. Latvia successfully fulfils its national plan under the Recovery and Resilience Facility, and consequently the European Commission has taken a decision to make the first disbursement of funds to Latvia. The next disbursement is expected in 2023, when Latvia would have completed the next milestones and targets set out in its national plan. At the same time, Latvia is planning to make use of the opportunities offered by the European Union's REPowerEU plan to facilitate independence of Russia fossil fuel resources and fast forward the green transition.

A fully functional European Union single market without artificial barriers remains one of Latvia's main, and horizontal priorities in order to ensure the accessibility of cross-border services and a level playing field for Latvian people and companies. To address the problems highlighted during the COVID-19 crisis in the single market and European economy as a whole, in September 2022, the European Commission presented a proposal on the establishment of a Single Market Emergency Instrument, which is still being elaborated. This instrument aims to preserve the free movement of goods, services and persons and the availability of essential goods and services in the event of future emergencies, to the benefit of citizens and businesses across the European Union. Latvia supports paying greater attention to crisis preparedness; however, Latvia will stand up for the solutions offered to be compliant with the principles of the single market and also ensure a free movement of persons, goods and services under a state of emergency.

Strengthening of the European Union's economic resilience

Latvia supports the strengthening of the European Union's economic resilience to reduce long-term vulnerabilities and dependencies of the European economy. It is important for Latvia that an open strategic autonomy of the European Union is promoted while preserving sector-specific competitiveness, as well as ensuring the accessibility of critical raw materials and components and supply alternatives for Latvian businesses. Latvia stands up for preserving openness towards global partners, especially like-minded countries – the United States of America, Canada, the United Kingdom, Japan, Korea, and Australia – in the process of strengthening self-sufficiency.

To help restructure supply chains and enhance their resilience in crisis, March 2022 saw the establishment of the European Union's Supply Chain Resilience Platform, which offers support to companies in finding new suppliers and export markets. The platform helps companies retain, restructure, or replace existing supply chains, as well as source raw materials, parts, components and/or (semi-)finished goods or services they need to keep production going. Latvia welcomes the newly-established platform since it provides support for companies in various sectors to find new suppliers and markets.

To enhance the European Union's resilience, it is essential to reduce the impact of distortions created by subsidies on the EU economy and ensure secure investments in the European Union, thereby protecting European innovation and technological growth. A major step towards this goal was the adoption of the Foreign Subsidies Regulation addressing distortions created by subsidies that are granted by non-EU countries to companies operating on the European Union's Single Market.

The European Commission has announced that, in early 2023, a proposal is expected on the European Critical Raw Materials Act for the purpose of identifying strategic projects, developing the extraction of raw materials, and building up strategic reserves where supply is at

risk. It will be important for Latvia to identify in discussions, and get involved in Europe's critical raw material supply chains. We see this as an opportunity to strengthen engagement with the closest partners, for instance, Ukraine, in European economy and deepening cooperation with them. Doing so would reduce the European Union's and Latvia's dependence on unreliable and unpredictable suppliers of raw materials.

With the aim of enhancing the European Union's capabilities and technological advancement, the development of the Important Projects of Common European Interest is ongoing in the areas such as hydrogen, batteries and cloud computing. The involvement of Latvian companies and search for cooperation partners is being promoted to develop those initiatives and create innovative products. The European Commission is planning to increase the European Union's financial contribution to project development thus motivating companies to participate in initiatives that are not pursued in the absence of support due to risks being too high. Latvian companies have expressed their interest and submitted project proposals in the areas of microelectronics, the next generation cloud computing, and healthcare services.

Development of connectivity

Latvia supports the implementation of the Global Gateway—the European Union's connectivity strategy—and is interested in contributing. The Global Gateway combines financial instruments and attracts private sector investments to the European Union's Member States in the sectors of digitalisation, technologies, energy and transport, as well as health care, education, research and environmental projects. Latvia's priority in the framework of the strategy is to enhance delivery on the existing connectivity partnerships in Central Asia and the Eastern Partnership countries. In Latvia's opinion, the strategy should also be attuned to funds and financial instruments envisaged for the restoration of the destroyed infrastructure and connectivity in Ukraine. Latvia's interests lie in the strengthening of connectivity between the European Union and Ukraine by creating new transport corridors for servicing Ukraine's exports and imports through the use of Latvia's ports.

In 2022, Riga hosted the Three Seas Initiative (3SI) Summit and Business Forum, which was last year's largest international level event in Latvia. Riga welcomed leading officials from the 3SI members and its partner countries, as well as the European Union and international financial institutions, business people and journalists. One of the successes of the summit was an announcement from the United States of America concerning its financial contribution to the Three Seas Investment Fund. The Business Forum went well, bringing together more than 600 participants from the investment and business sector. A 3SI Civil Society Forum and a Parliamentary Forum were organised for the first time in the history of the 3SI. The Summit Declaration voiced support for Ukraine and this support will now be included in the initiative, with the aim of facilitating Ukraine's participation in the 3SI region's connectivity projects in the energy, transport and digital sectors.

The Baltic States have made considerable progress with the implementation of the *Rail Baltica* project; uninterrupted and foreseeable financial flows, as well as successful cooperation with international partners are vitally important for finishing the project in due time. The Foreign Service will continue enhancing the visibility of the project in various formats by inviting foreign companies to take part in procurement for *Rail Baltica*. Keeping improvements to the regional transport infrastructure in the Baltic States in mind, it is important to make the 5G network accessible both in the *Rail Baltica* and *Via Baltica* transport corridors, in order to facilitate sustainable mobility, develop innovations in the transport sector, and improve traffic safety.

Digital transition

In 2022, the long-standing effort on a European Union scale legal framework for online platforms yielded success. The fight against disinformation on those platforms will be supported

by the Digital Services Act, and in addition, a call for interest has been launched for new signatories to join the strengthened 2022 Code of Practice on Disinformation. To a great degree, due to active involvement by Latvia and other European Union Member States, those documents constitute an effective tool that would make it possible to eliminate the risks posed by disinformation and illegal content online, while guaranteeing and strengthening the freedom of speech. In the next few years, the greatest challenge will lie in ensuring effective implementation of the new regulation at the European Union and national level.

The Digital Markets Act, which has come into effect, will ensure fair and transparent rules of competition for Latvian businesses in the use of the large online platforms. To take forward the digitalisation process in the European Union, an agreement has been achieved on the 2030 Policy Programme, “Path to the Digital Decade”, which sets out the concrete digital targets for the European Union and Latvia, thereby also highlighting priority directions for investment.

The European Union’s security and sustainability will depend on its ability to ensure favourable international preconditions for its digital development. Not only should the European Union reduce dependence from third countries in the digital realm, it should also actively, on a global scale, build a digital environment which is in keeping with European values and promotes economically, politically and socially sustainable development across the world. While it is important for the European Union to reinforce cooperation with allies and like-minded countries, it must more actively seek points of intersection with a broader circle of countries and non-governmental actors, especially in the United Nations and other international formats. Therefore, Latvia would like to see a more powerful and better coordinated foreign digital policy for the European Union. From Latvia’s perspective, it is highly important to connect the European Union’s investments with support for capacity building in third countries in the digital sector, thereby promoting convergence with the European Union’s legal framework and standards on the basis of democratic values and human rights. It is of special importance for Latvia that those principles underpin development in the digital realm in the European Union’s neighbouring countries who see their future in coming closer to the European Union. Continued dialogue with the United States of America and other allies in digital matters is also a priority for Latvia, especially issues on which the European Union and its partners have a different legal perspective, including in the field of digital platforms and artificial intelligence.

Expanding the networks of the European Union’s free trade agreements

Latvia stands up for the need for the European Union to promote predictable and rules-based international trade. Latvia’s economic interests lie in expanding and effectively implementing a network of free trade agreements; therefore, together with the European Union, work is going on to launch new trade negotiations and facilitate those currently underway. In 2022, a new trade agreement with New Zealand and a modernised Association Agreement with Chile, which still have to be approved by internal procedures of each of the parties, was added to the existing European Union’s trade agreements. A significant advancement has taken place concerning an agreement with Mexico, talks have been resumed with India, and negotiations with Australia and Indonesia continue. Meanwhile, concerns over the possible impact on of an Association Agreement between the European Union and Mercosur (Brazil, Argentina, Paraguay, and Uruguay) on deforestation of the Amazon rain forests have paused the advancement of the agreement. In 2023, it will be important for Latvia to make every effort jointly with the European Commission and other European Union Member States towards the signing of agreements with Mexico, Mercosur, and New Zealand, finalising negotiations with Australia, and moving ahead in talks with India and Indonesia. These agreements not only create new export opportunities and offer access to critical raw materials in partner countries; they are

also important geopolitically in building reliable partnership relations and strengthening the European Union values on a global scale.

Promotion of Latvia's foreign economic activity

The promotion of foreign trade and attraction of investment remains of permanent importance for the Foreign Service, and is done in close cooperation with the Investment and Development Agency of Latvia (LIAA). Both the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and embassies organise seminars on specific sectors or regions; in individual meetings with organisations representing businesses and with sectoral clusters, needs and problems are identified and consultations are provided for a more targeted support to businesses as in entering foreign markets. The Foreign Service is also making use of the network of Latvia's Honorary Consuls as an effective resource in support of exports. In July 2022, Riga hosted the annual meeting of Honorary Consuls, which provided vast insight into the offerings and products of Latvia's exporting companies.

Latvia's geographical proximity to Russia and Belarus caused concerns among Western investors in the initial phase of the war, impeding the incoming tourism. Nevertheless, due to the outreach and communication activities by the Latvian diplomatic missions abroad concerning the actions of their government and line ministries it was possible to strengthen the investors' trust and improve both the inflow of investments and the number of tourists.

In addition, the Foreign Service offered assistance to Latvia's leading companies and research institutions to explore opportunities for becoming part of the global value chains of the development and manufacturing of microprocessors, lobbying the potential of microprocessor related research and development in Latvia, in particular.

Organised in cooperation with the United Kingdom, a discussion of the Baltic and Nordic experts on the diversification of telecommunication technology markets launched a broader-scale exchange of views on how to expand competitiveness and innovation opportunities for technology companies in the telecommunications sector. This is in the interests of Latvia's largest technology companies.

With a view to expanding the Latvian business people's perspective of new export opportunities and challenges in foreign markets, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, with support from the Directorate General for Trade of the European Commission and LIAA, held an informative event, Market Access Day 2022, this time with the focus on Latin American and African markets.

An important position in export promotion events is taken by the participation of businesses in the visits of high-ranking Latvian officials abroad. In 2022, businesses were successfully involved in visits to Uzbekistan, the United States of America, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and Egypt, as well as the visit to Israel by the President of Latvia.

During the Spotlight Latvia 2022 forum held in the United States of America, businesses together with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and line ministries set things moving in contacts with the U.S. film industry for filming in Latvia. The event also gave new impetus for cooperation with Stanford University in higher education and in the field of technologies, as part of which, several Stanford students have chosen Latvia's high-tech companies for their summer internship course. In addition, a possibility is being considered of concluding an agreement on the internship of doctoral students from Riga Technical University in Stanford to perform independent research. A mutual interest in cooperation in telecommunication and 5G projects also exists with Canada. A visit to Canada organised by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and with participation of businesses was of special importance: the event highlighted shared interest in the development of military and dual-use technologies. At the same time, the largest Canadian investors (pension funds and

companies from the banking and energy sector) were approached, drawing their attention to investment opportunities in environmental technologies, including the energy sector, in Latvia.

It is important to maintain cooperation with Central Asian countries; therefore, together with Uzbekistan, Latvia's largest trade partner in Central Asia, we have identified the need for closer cooperation in transport, pharmaceuticals, agriculture, trade and cultural contacts, which is evidenced by the Road Map signed during the Latvian Foreign Minister's visit to Uzbekistan.

Unexplored potential for economic cooperation exists in relations with Egypt. During the Foreign Minister's visit to Cairo, mutual interest of the private sector of the two countries was revealed concerning cooperation in the field of information and communication technologies, which created momentum for further cooperation. The Middle East region is also important for Latvia, as proven by a great interest and participation of Latvian companies in EXPO 2020 Dubai in the United Arab Emirates. With support from the foreign service, the second meeting of the Latvia-UAE Joint Economic Committee was held in the sidelines of EXPO 2020 Dubai, which highlighted joint interest in expanding trade and investments and building cooperation in innovations and technologies, transport and logistics, energy, education and science, agriculture and food industry.

In total, during 2022, the Foreign Service in association with LIAA and non-governmental partners organised participation of businesses in visits abroad by seven senior officials; ambassadors, for their part, made 66 regional visits in their host countries, organised 42 forums and sector-specific seminars, contributed to 39 stands in international exhibitions, and arranged 74 meetups and networking events for businesses. This has contributed to increased export volumes, which was EUR 17.3 billion in the first ten months of 2022, which exceeds the respective period in 2021 by 30%; meanwhile, foreign direct investment in Latvia as of the end of IIIQ 2022 had increased by 6% compared to the end of 2021.

The Foreign Service will continue supporting businesses as they seek to explore and enter new export markets, with a special focus on Australia and New Zealand, Africa, and Latin America. In terms of attracting investments, there is a high potential that in the near future we could be seeing an increased inflow of Japanese financial capital in Latvia's economy.

Having joined the European Organisation for Nuclear Research (CERN) as an Associate Member State, arrangements required for Latvia to move towards full membership of CERN were initiated in 2022, and the next step will be the preparatory stage for full membership in 2023. The course towards full membership will offer Latvian businesses better opportunities to take part in CERN procurement.

Since 2020, Latvia has been successfully taking part in the programmes of the European Space Agency (ESA) as an Associate Member, and Latvian organisations are carrying out 20 projects in various ESA programmes. As from 2023, Latvia is planning to set up a European Space Education Resource Office (ESERO) in Cēsis and an ESA Business Incubation Centre in Riga, thereby promoting growth of this industry in Latvia and the transfer of space technologies to other sectors.

The World Trade Organisation

Latvia supports a rules-based, stable and predictable global trading system with the World Trade Organisation at its core. After an interval of several years, the Twelfth World Trade Organisation Ministerial Conference was held, which saw the adoption of a decision important for Latvia—to launch the institutional reform of the World Trade Organisation and resume the work of its dispute settlement system—, which will allow Latvia to better protect the interests of its companies in third country markets.

The Ministerial Conference also adopted decisions of global relevance, which will help the world's poorest population to overcome the negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and

reduce the burden on the development cooperation budgets of Latvia and other donors. A decision was taken to on the exemption of food purchases under the United Nations' humanitarian assistance from export restrictions. In addition, the countries agreed on easements for developing countries in obtaining licences to produce COVID-19 vaccines. The ministers also concurred on an agreement prohibiting harmful fisheries subsidies and protecting the world's fish stock, thereby facilitating the achievement of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and environmental sustainability.

With preparations under way for the next Ministerial Conference, it is important for Latvia that suitable trade rules are created for a modern economy. Latvia supports the work of the World Trade Organisation in developing regulations in the e-commerce sector, which would have a positive impact on the information and communications technology sector rapidly growing in Latvia through creating a safe online environment for companies and consumers.

Latvia's membership in the OECD and adoption of best international practices

A considerable change to the OECD agenda has been wrought by the precipitation of Russia's war against Ukraine. The OECD Council unanimously condemned Russia's behaviour in the strongest terms as a blatant violation of international law and serious threat to a rules-based international order. Shortly after, the OECD suspended cooperation with Russia and Belarus; meanwhile, an OECD Ukraine Liaison Office was established, the aim of which is to promote cooperation with Ukraine by initiating coordination of the OECD's contribution to postwar reconstruction and provision of support for the implementation of structural reforms. Latvia is among the OECD member states, the most active advocates of deepening the organisation's cooperation with Ukraine and allocating funds for work with Ukraine from the OECD's basic budget. Latvia will further stand up for OECD support to structural reforms in Ukraine to be kept high on the organisation's agenda. OECD member states approved of engaging in an initial accession dialogue with Ukraine. It is important for Latvia that OECD continue to consistently support the processes of socio-economic reform in the Eastern Partnership and Central Asian countries.

Latvia is an active member of the OECD; it uses the cooperation and research opportunities offered by the organisation, as well as taking part in the development of standards and recommendations for the implementation of policy programmes. In March 2022, the OECD economic survey of Latvia on a two-year cycle was presented, offering recommendations on the reduction of inequality, addressing regional differences, improving accessibility of housing, continuing improvements to the effectiveness of the judicial system, implementing reforms in health care, improving the pension system, as well as strengthening the system of education, innovation, and science.

Bilateral projects with the OECD continue to provide opportunities for attracting the organisation's experts to evaluate the situation in Latvia and give recommendations on more effective policy models. With increasing frequency, Latvia's officials not only use OECD recommendation as they are drawing up policy documents and legislation, but also actively engage in OECD work both by contributing to the OECD's best practices and producing recommendations, and by getting involved in the organisation and management of work in OECD committees. On a regular basis, Latvian experts take part in peer reviews of other member countries and governance capacity-building projects in third countries to introduce partners to Latvia's best policy practices.

Strengthening effectiveness and influence of the European Union

The primary challenges of the past years—COVID-19 and Russia’s aggression against Ukraine—have demonstrated that, in critical moments, the European Union is capable of manifesting a strong, unified and solidarity-based policy. At the same time, what has been achieved through compromise has often turned out to be the lowest common denominator. That makes separate Member States come forward with proposals on the need to change decision-making procedures in the European Union or even the European Union’s legal framework as a whole. In addition, separate Member States tend to drift away from the understanding of fundamental values. Latvia stands up for improvements to the effectiveness of decision-making so that the European Union could more effectively protect its interests and increase its global influence, while remaining a values-based union of national states, a union where institutional balance is being observed. Appraisal and implementation of recommendations prepared by the Conference on the Future of Europe could be of considerable assistance in both defining the future vector of the European Union’s development and enhancing citizens’ trust in the European Union in general. Latvia believes that, in the upcoming discussions on improving the European Union’s effectiveness, it is important for the Baltic States— and, in a broader context, the Baltic and Nordic countries—to cooperate in shaping a common view and moving the processes forward.

Latvia’s interests lie in the further strengthening of the European Union’s role and influence in international processes, in particular, to foster stability and prosperity in the European Union’s neighbouring regions. Therefore, a new impetus should be given to the process of enlargement and relations with neighbours should be intensified as a matter of priority. As Russia’s positions in the European Union’s neighbouring regions are weakening, both a destructive response by Russia and increasing competition from other actors are expected. In a broader context, with a view to fostering common awareness of belonging to Europe, Latvia welcomes the establishment of the format of the European Political Community and the opportunities this offers for an informal exchange of views between heads of state and government to discuss issues important for Europe.

The shaping of the European Union’s cooperation with China is a subject gaining more and more significance as the character of mutual relationship is getting progressively more complicated.

Follow-up on the recommendations of the Conference on the Future of Europe

The Conference on the Future of Europe came to a close in May 2022. Its final report contains 49 proposals from citizens and more than 300 concrete measures of how the proposals could be put in practice. On the basis of the report, the Council of the European Union and the European Commission are now examining how to follow up effectively on those proposals. In terms of the share of population, people in Latvia were among the most active among the citizens of the European Union Member States to express their viewpoints and ideas. During the conference, nearly 60 citizen-led events—discussions, debates, festivals—took place in Latvia and research was undertaken. Many ideas from Latvian citizens—in particular, in the areas such as climate change, innovations in green technologies, energy resources and their rising costs, the quality of healthcare, occupational safety and quality of life, and issues of digital transformation—are reflected in the final report of the Conference. At the same time, the report also contains several controversial topics—a call to replace the principle of a unanimous vote with qualified majority

voting in decision-making at the Council of the European Union, as well as proposals concerning reopening of fundamental European treaties. In further discussions, Latvia's position on a broader application of the qualified majority principle will remain unchanged: to keep the unanimity principle in as many areas as possible, especially in decisions concerning the European Union's common foreign policy and security policy. Latvia also believes that this is not the right time for revisiting the fundamental treaties of the European Union and for ambitious experiments with uncertain results, given the challenges posed by Russia's aggression against Ukraine. The European Union should focus on addressing pressing matters and formulating proposals that can be implemented within the European Union's existing legal framework.

Strengthening the rule of law in the European Union

In 2022, the European Commission put forward safeguarding of the rule of law as one of its principal goals. The European Commission published the third annual Rule of Law Report, which for the first time contained specific recommendations addressed to each Member State, including Latvia. With regard to Latvia, the report commends the effectiveness of the judicial system, notes effective investigation of corruption cases, freedom of speech and information, and a favourable environment for the participation of civil society in decision making. At the same time, the report voices concern about the high concentration of the mass media outlets and online threats to journalists. It has been concluded that public involvement in decision-making processes at the municipal level is weaker than at the national level. Four recommendations have been offered to Latvia in the report: to reduce political influence in the appointment of Supreme Court judges, to implement the action plan for the prevention and combating of corruption, to adopt the legislation on lobbying and set up a lobby register, and increase the participation of civil society in decision-making at the local level. A part of those recommendations has already been put in practice.

For the first time, under the Regulation on a general regime of conditionality for the protection of the Union budget that took effect in 2021, a new instrument has been used to protect the European Union budget against financial risks created by violations of the rule of law in an individual Member State—Hungary. Hungary has undertaken to eliminate shortcomings and ensure the protection of the European Union's budget. However, the process of in-depth oversight continues regarding Hungary and Poland in the understanding of Article 7 of the Treaty on European Union.

The European Commission and the European Union Member States have also committed to protect the rule of law and democracy in 2023 in both the European Union and countries on their path to the European Union membership. The European Commission's plans include support for judicial independence, the fight against the influence of foreign authoritarian regimes on the political system in the European Union, and improvements to the anti-corruption legal framework by drafting a defence of democracy legislative package.

Latvia continues advocating the idea that effective functioning of the European Union is based on the principles of democracy, the rule of law and human rights. Compliance with judgments of the European Court of Justice are of vital importance in the legal order of the European Union. From Latvia's perspective, the unity of Member States and the safeguarding of values enshrined in the Treaties of the European Union can be promoted through an ongoing dialogue between Member States and with institutions.

Relations with the United Kingdom

No visible progress can be observed in the relations of the European Union with the United Kingdom. The main differences are still caused by talks on the implementation of the Protocol on Ireland and Northern Ireland (North Ireland Protocol). Latvia is interested in preserving and

strengthening cooperation with the United Kingdom as one of the high priority strategic partners to the European Union, while preserving the European Union's unity and achieving a common solution to the implementation of the North Ireland Protocol.

The United Kingdom remains an essential security partner and ally of Latvia in Europe. We are linked by a common understanding of threats and challenges to European security. The United Kingdom is a like-minded ally in NATO. The state has given clear and noteworthy support to Ukraine and has been one of the most vocal in condemning Russia. We hope for closer cooperation and dialogue between the European Union and the United Kingdom in the field of foreign and security policy. A coordinated sanctions policy against Russia in relation to war in Ukraine has demonstrated that this cooperation is very important, and it is possible.

The United Kingdom has also been providing support for the reinforcement of Latvia's security by organising training for the Latvian National Guard (*Zemessardze*) units to improve their fighting ability and individual skills as well as taking part in military exercises in Latvia on a regular basis.

The enlargement process and neighbourhood policies

Russia's aggression has brought to light the importance of the enlargement process and the European Neighbourhood Policy and the need for creating a broader space of security and the rule of law. The European Union took a historic decision on granting candidate status to Ukraine and Moldova, and recognised the European perspective for Georgia. The first Intergovernmental Conferences have been held with Albania and North Macedonia in order to launch negotiations on their accession to the European Union. Bosnia and Herzegovina has been granted candidate status, and an agreement on visa free travel has been reached with Kosovo. Latvia will also further actively advance the enlargement agenda for both the Balkans region and Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia. Latvia will continue providing support and sharing its reform experience. At the same time, we expect the candidate countries to implement reforms and clearly pledge their readiness to support common European values and a rules-based international order.

Awarding the status of candidate for European Union membership to Ukraine and Moldova and recognising a clear European perspective for Georgia has created greater need for revising the elements of the European Union's Eastern Partnership policy. From Latvia's perspective, the Eastern Partnership is an effective additional instrument for the eurointegration of Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia, thus enhancing the opportunities of those countries on their path to the European Union. Likewise, in continued support for all the Eastern Partnership countries, including Armenia and Azerbaijan, Latvia believes that policy should be aligned with the present-day challenges in the region through enhancing resilience of the partner countries and their ties with Europe in practical cooperation. It is essential to support democratisation processes in the region and reduce, as much as possible, the dependencies and vulnerabilities of the countries, including in the financial and economic sector. Latvia provides support for enacting reforms in the region's countries, its priorities being public governance, corruption prevention, business development, and resilience of society against disinformation.

In the context of Russia's war, Central Asian countries have been carefully keeping their balance, while maintaining their relations with the European Union, including in the policy of non-violation of sanctions. Power shifts are observed in Central Asia where, due to Russia's resources being engaged in the war in Ukraine, the influence of other regional actors is increasing. Latvia sustains dialogue with Central Asia and supports the resilience of the region's countries in the face of Russian pressure. Ministerial level meetings, political consultations and visits by representatives from line ministries and Latvian state-owned companies have taken place in the region. Latvia has assumed a leading role in the European Union's Border Management Programme in Central Asia, BOMCA, thereby contributing to the practical implementation of the European Union's

Strategy for Central Asia. Latvia will continue supporting European Union initiatives in Central Asia, including in the field of migration and economic relations. Latvia's interests lie in the strengthening of its role in building the connectivity of the Central Asian region with respect to passenger and freight transportation.

Following up on the *Renewed partnership with the Southern Mediterranean: A new agenda for the Mediterranean*, adopted in 2021 and aimed at sustainable economic development, good governance and the rule of law, digital transformation and green transition, the European Union has concluded several agreements with its Southern neighbours on closer cooperation, including in the energy sector and migration management. It is also important to address the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic and improve socio-economic conditions in the region by way of addressing the root causes of migration and reducing the risks of radicalisation; this also corresponds to Latvia's national interests.

Prospects for relations with China

China is increasingly assertive in expanding its global economic and political influence, including through provision of an alternative vision by advancing initiatives that affect and impact multilateralism, respect for the norms of democracy, global development and security policy, while criticising Western positions rooted in universal values. China continues its muscle-flexing in the South China Sea region, especially vis à vis Taiwan, thereby posing risks to stability in the region. China distancing itself from condemnation of Russia's invasion of Ukraine is one more alarming signal. On the domestic front of China, authoritarian tendencies are on the rise, and this includes systematic human rights abuses, notably in Xinjiang.

In this situation, Latvia sees the essential need to continue the European Union's multilevel approach to China as a cooperation partner, economic competitor and systemic rival. We must continue urging China to assume a more decisive and responsible position against the war waged by Russia in Ukraine. Protecting the European Union's economic interests and achieving equal access to the Chinese market is of special importance, as well as countering China's practice of applying economic pressure as a political instrument against separate European Union Member States, thereby exercising influence on the European single market. Latvia supports the need to develop a constructive relationship with China, especially in addressing global challenges such as climate change, non-proliferation, and fostering stability in the Indo-Pacific region, while being aware of the widening values gap in the relations between the European Union and China. Together with allies in NATO, Latvia will also assess the impact of China on international security and the development of China's strategic partnership with Russia. Latvia withdrew from the "16+1" format of Cooperation between China and Central and Eastern European Countries since it was at variance with Latvia's strategic interests. At the same time, Latvia is prepared to build constructive and open relations with China, evaluating opportunities for cooperation on the basis of a mutual benefits, while not avoiding issues on which the positions are considerably different.

The Baltic States' cooperation and the Baltic-Nordic format

To deliver on the above-listed foreign policy related commitments in the framework of the European Union, we will primarily work towards closer coordination of the agenda and activities with our closest neighbours. In the Baltic-Nordic region, we are of the same mind—not only concerning regional security issues, but also the role of the European Union and improving the effectiveness of its functioning. A motivation for closer cooperation between the Baltic States is also created by the Latvia-Estonia and Latvia-Lithuania future cooperation reports drawn up on the initiative of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs in 2022. In a wider region, such opportunities are offered in 2023, as Latvia assumes coordination of cooperation in the Baltic-Nordic format.

In 2022, it was the Baltic States cooperation that took on a weightier role in facilitating decision-making processes in the European Union. Latvia's presidency of the Baltic Council of Ministers in 2022 had an ambitious agenda that covered the strengthening of the region's defence cooperation, promoting economic modernisation, and strong support for the Eastern Partnership neighbours. The new security situation actually prompted Latvia and its closest like-minded allies, Estonia and Lithuania, to assume greater responsibility and leadership in shaping a strong response to Russian aggression at the level of the European Union. Separate issues involving sanctions and security at the European Union's external borders were initially addressed in the Baltic region and later taken over at the Union level. Strong interaction between the Baltic States is absolutely indispensable and should be expanded further.

With this rationale—to promote an increasing integration of the region—this year, we also took over coordination in the Baltic-Nordic framework. It is in our security interests to ensure a more united and stronger voice of the region, including in the debate on the future of the European Union. We see the need to instrumentalise cooperation in the format through focusing the resources of the Baltic and Nordic countries on shaping the security environment of tomorrow, which includes the enhancement of the rules-based international order and strengthening the region's defence and resilience capabilities. Upon the accession of Finland and Sweden to NATO in 2023, we shall be placing a stronger emphasis on the region's defence and security policy initiatives. At the same time, we want to be strengthening the coordination of support for Ukraine, especially the reconstruction initiatives, in the Baltic-Nordic format.

Links with Latvians abroad

In 2022, as the Action Plan for Work with the Diaspora for 2021–2023 was being put into operation, special attention was devoted to remigration matters, support for the diaspora media, and harnessing the scientific potential of the diaspora.

A Remigration Coordination Working Group has been set up and is functioning under the Diaspora Advisory Council to ensure a regular inter-institutional coordination of planning and implementation of measures in support of remigration. The group's activities are focused on three priorities: stronger support for remigrants and their family members in learning the Latvian language; broader involvement of local governments and their role in promoting remigration in association with regional remigration coordinators; allocating return benefits, or grants, to remigrants to start business in Latvia. In an effort to improve the work of the diaspora media and ensure their sustainability, to educate journalists covering the diaspora issues, and to build cooperation between the media in Latvia and the diaspora media, the Diaspora Advisory Council has set up a Diaspora Media Working Group. Its main function is the strengthening of the role of diaspora media in bringing together Latvians living abroad and maintaining the informational link with Latvia by providing information both on current diaspora-related events in their host countries and on processes in Latvia and worldwide. In the education sector, legislation provides the opportunity for persons who do not hold a doctorate but have a corresponding level of higher education and professional experience to apply for academic staff posts in Latvia's higher education institutions, which makes it possible to engage highly qualified members of the diaspora with international experience. Legislation has been put in place envisaging that higher education institutions are granted the right to carry out expert assessment of academic credentials and education documents issued abroad.

In 2022, as part of the World Latvian Economics and Innovations Forum, the Forum of Latvian Professionals Working for International Organisations was organised in cooperation between the President's Chancery, the State Chancellery, and the Economic Cooperation and Investments for Latvia (#esiLV) Association. The event is being established as an annual cooperation platform.

Close cooperation continued with the Centre for Diaspora and Migration Studies at the University of Latvia, which has produced two research reports—*The Involvement of Latvia's Professionals in the Diaspora Diplomacy and the Potential of Networking Diplomacy*, and *Economic Cooperation of the Latvian Diaspora*. The aim of the reports is to assess the best ways to involve members of the diaspora in the representation of Latvia's political interests abroad, in public diplomacy, shaping and promoting Latvia's image, and the use of the economic and innovative potential of the diaspora for the benefit of Latvia's economic development. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, jointly with the Ministry of Economics, LIAA, the Bank of Latvia, and the World Federation of Free Latvians has organised two networking meetings for diaspora businesses in Germany and the United Kingdom.

In 2022, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs received 144 project applications from diaspora organisations in 25 countries; of those, 91 projects were supported in 21 countries for the total amount of EUR 160,968.42. Traditionally, the countries hosting the largest Latvian communities yield the largest number of projects applied for and approved: 16 projects from the United Kingdom, 14 projects from Germany, and 12 projects from Ireland. The Ministry of Culture, the Ministry of Education and Science, and the Society Integration Fund have provided support for the diaspora NGOs and communities in support of projects in culture, the Latvian language and education, as well as events proposed by the diaspora communities themselves.

In 2023, with the aim of fostering self-organisation among the diaspora and maintaining the link with Latvia, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs will continue supporting projects devised by the diaspora organisations, and invite the diaspora organisations to develop projects that document the formation and functioning of diaspora organisations, and projects that promote self-organisation among youth and their involvement of diaspora activities. A high priority will be attached to cooperation with an organisation European Youth established in 2020 and with Latvian students abroad. In order to ensure awareness and feedback from the Latvian diaspora and mobile citizens, cooperation will be enhanced with the largest informative platform for Latvians worldwide, Latviesi.com. In 2023, the priority task will be to draft the Action Plan for Work with the Diaspora for 2024–2026 together with other ministries involved in the shaping and implementation of the diaspora policy. There are also plans to organise the annual World Latvian Economics and Innovations Forum and the Spotlight Latvia 2023 business conference. In August, the second Forum of Latvian Professionals Working for International Organisations will take place.

Consular work

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in association with other institutions, continued work to enable Latvian nationals living abroad to receive services by Latvian public authorities remotely. At the same time, the number of consular services provided on-site at diplomatic missions remained high. In 2022, nearly 180,000 paid consular services were provided, which exceeds the figures for 2021 by 40%. Demand for personal identity documents was especially high. In 2022, diplomatic missions organised more than 30 trips within their countries of residence and to other countries of accreditation to ensure better opportunities for Latvian nationals to obtain personal identity documents. In total in 2022, approximately 50,000 personal identity documents were processed, which made up an increase of 70% compared to 2021. The missions collected about EUR 5.5 million in state fees and consular revenues for consular services provided in 2022, which was by 40% more than in 2021.

For the 14th Saeima elections, the citizens of Latvia living abroad were provided with the opportunity to vote at 81 polling stations in 42 countries across the globe. Half of the polling stations were set up in the premises of diplomatic missions, the other half were arranged thanks to efforts of members of the diaspora, including in the countries where there are no Latvian

missions. To make it possible for as large a number of voters as possible to cast their votes, 22 polling stations in diplomatic missions also accepted votes by mail, used by 3031 voters. In total, 26,146 voters in foreign countries, or 16.13% of persons eligible to vote, took part in the 14th Saeima elections.

In 2022, the agenda in the field of incoming travel and the issuance of visas was determined by Russia's war against Ukraine and the counter-measures coming in its wake. As a result, in 2022, the number of visas issued by Latvia's diplomatic missions to Russian citizens dropped by 70%, amounting to about 3,000. After a joint decision taken in September by Latvia, Estonia, Lithuania, and Poland to introduce even tighter travel restrictions on Russia, the number of Russian citizens entering Latvia has decreased by almost 40%. A little more than 20,000 Russian citizens have entered Latvia, but entry was denied to almost 500 Russian citizens. Conversely, close to 22,000 Russian citizens have left Latvia.

With the lifting of travel restrictions imposed due to the pandemic, 2022 saw a 25% increase in the number of visa requests from third country citizens, amounting to about 35,000 applications.

Russia's aggression against Ukraine in 2022 also had a direct influence on the work of the foreign service in the field of consular assistance. With the outbreak of hostilities, the evacuation of Latvian nationals and those of other European Union Member States, and their family members was organised from Ukraine, helping 261 persons to leave the country in four bus runs.

In 2022, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs not only continued the provision of consular assistance but also preventively drew public attention to travel risks. In the summer and winter of 2022, the Ministry launched its annual informational campaign, Safe Travel. In addition, in partnership with the Ministry of the Interior, an awareness raising campaign was put together for job-seekers going abroad, "Don't let yourself be used", or "Employment abroad. Be wary of tempting offers". The campaigns' visual materials with advice to travellers and job seekers were disseminated in the digital space, and the campaign video was screened in Riga's public transportation, at the airport and elsewhere.

To enhance the readiness of the consular service for a faster and more effective crisis response, the optimisation of daily work at consular service will continue in 2023, which also includes the development of modern technical solutions—building up a new Consular Register and improvements to the Unified Fees Recording System.

Involvement of civil society and public diplomacy

Since the beginning of the war unleashed by Russia on Ukraine, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in its outgoing communications, has expressed firm and unwavering support for Ukraine and condemned the unjustified and unprovoked Russian aggression. Following the Russian invasion, effective communication was ensured concerning the evacuation of Latvian nationals from Ukraine in cooperation with the Ministry of Transport, the Consular Department, and the Latvian Embassy in Kyiv. The Foreign Ministry was also actively involved in an informative campaign coordinated by the State Chancellery and called on people in Latvia to provide assistance to Ukrainians and register themselves with the palidziukrainai.lv (Help Ukraine) platform. Calls for help are spread by non-governmental organisations and public communication is being sustained concerning Latvia's support for Ukraine and voluntary contributions to international organisations to address the humanitarian situation and provide aid to Ukrainian civilians and refugees. The Latvian Ministry of Foreign Affairs continues providing information on support for Ukraine from the Latvian government, including updated information to the Kiel Institute for the World Economy, which is collecting data from all countries. In view of the high risk of disinformation caused and augmented by the Kremlin and the followers of its ideology in the

information space, regular communication is ensured, together with the State Chancellery, to raise public awareness and explain the existing risks and how to avoid them.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs receives significant support in its work from members of civil society; a continuing dialogue has taken place with foreign policy and security policy research centres, social partners, academia, a vast circle of experts, and civil society organisations.

Topics of current relevance for the European Union, including the preparation of Latvia's national position before the meetings of the European Council, are discussed with members of civil society on a regular basis. Long-lasting partners in this field are the Latvian Association of Local and Regional Governments, the Employers' Confederation of Latvia, the Free Trade Union Confederation of Latvia, the Providus think-tank, and the Women's NGOs Cooperation Network in Latvia. In April and September, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in cooperation with the European Parliament Liaison Office, the European Commission Representation in Latvia, and the European Movement in Latvia association, organised the European Union Information Providers' Forum for EU information contacts at national and local governments, head of EU Information Points, representatives from Europe Direct Information Centres, as well as the media and non-governmental organisations, the main topics for discussion being energy-related challenges and solidarity with Ukraine.

This year as well, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs cooperated with the Ministry of Defence and the Latvian Transatlantic Organisation (LATO) to organise the Riga Conference, bringing together high-ranking officials, experts, diplomats and members of the media from foreign countries, the European Union, and NATO. The main topics for discussion were the latest security policy developments in the Baltic region, Europe, and the transatlantic space, lessons learned in Ukraine and support that Ukraine needs, and the European Union's strategic interests and challenges.

With support from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Latvian Institute of International Affairs, prepared and presented a publication on the Three Seas Initiative and its development prospects from the perspective of the member countries. The annual publication of *The Yearbook of Latvia's Foreign Policy and Security Policy* has also been prepared.

At the Lampa Conversation Festival, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, together with the State Chancellery, the Ministry of the Interior, and LATO, initiated a discussion, "We cannot but speak about security", addressing security and resilience in society, challenges in the information space, disinformation, and attempts to interfere with democratic processes. In the context of the war in Ukraine, and to highlight the role of women in dealing with international conflicts, where women are disproportionately more exposed to a variety of threats, the Ministry together with the Embassy of Germany in Latvia, the Konrad Adenauer Foundation, and LATO organised an exchange of views on "The role of women in addressing international conflicts".

The United Nations Youth Delegate Programme introduced in Latvia in 2019 has become an opportunity for youth to make their opinion heard in international formats (the High Level Political Forum, the General Assembly, the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change—COP, ECOSOC Youth Forum, and others) and to gain a better understanding of current UN processes, including through the organisation of educational events about the UN for youth in Latvia. In August 2022, the United Nations Youth Delegate Programme brought together 60 young people at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, including UN Youth Delegates from Ukraine, Estonia, and Lithuania, to draft a youth resolution on the topics related to strengthening of resilience in the region and Baltic support for Ukraine. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs will continue providing support for the implementation of this programme in close partnership with Latvian youth representatives.

In January 2022, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs launched a public diplomacy programme abroad in support of a lobbying campaign for Latvia's candidacy for membership of the United Nations Security Council, and raising Latvia's visibility internationally. The programme aims at enhancing the country's prospects of gaining the required support at the

elections to the Security Council in 2025. With financial support from the programme, the Latvian diplomatic missions have organised 47 public events in foreign countries: seminars, conferences, round table discussions, themed events on UN-related topics prioritised by Latvia, such as women's rights and empowerment, development cooperation and climate action, Latvia's experience with the arms export control system, media freedom, cyberspace security and resilience to disinformation.

While holding the presidency of the Council of Europe, Latvia intends to organise more than ten public diplomacy events, including the following conferences—Freedom of Speech in the Digital Age, The Role of Courts in Enforcing the Judgments of the European Court of Human Rights, The Right to a Fair Trial in Anti-Doping Cases, and The Place of Contemporary Architecture in the Preservation of Cultural Heritage.