



# LATVIA

## NATO member



since 2004

## Defence share in GDP

2017

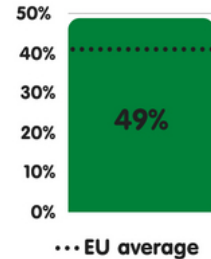


## PESCO projects

Participant



## Trust in EU



### What does the country fear?

Latvia perceives the main threats to its security as being external meddling in its domestic politics and – partly due to operations targeting computer networks in neighbouring Estonia in 2007 – cyber attacks. The Latvian government is working to boost national resilience against such attacks, which it sees as relatively cheap and difficult to attribute, yet dangerous for a small state that is increasingly dependent on digital networks. Due to the rhetoric of several politicians, many Latvians have begun to see unmanaged migration as a threat. Latvia no longer sees economic instability as an important a threat as it did in 2008 – a perception that has changed largely because of its successful handling of the financial crisis.

### Who does the country fear?

Latvia views neighbouring Russia as the most threatening actor it confronts. This perception of Russia as a threat increased substantially following the 2008 Russia-Georgia war and, most importantly, Moscow’s annexation of Crimea in 2014. Both events spurred the Latvian government to increase military spending. Nonetheless, Latvia’s leaders and public continue to be divided on the Russian question (Russians comprise around one-quarter of the country’s population). While the Latvian government has been pro-EU, pro-NATO, and pro-US since the fall of the Soviet Union, the largest Latvian opposition parties are pro-Russian and oppose EU sanctions on Russia. Nonetheless, even these parties agree that alignment with NATO and the European Union is in Latvia’s national interest.

### Essential security partners

Latvia’s main security partners in Europe include the United Kingdom, Germany, France, and Poland. Riga initially feared that Brexit would destabilise the European security framework. However, the UK reduced this concern with its declaration at the 2016 NATO Summit in Warsaw that it would maintain a military presence in Estonia. The United States has been Latvia’s main non-European strategic partner since the fall of the Soviet Union. The deployment of US military personnel and equipment to Latvia since 2014 has made the US even more central to Latvian security and defence. Riga perceives the US and the UK as important allies in balancing France’s and Germany’s sometimes ambiguous approach to Russia.

### The EU as a security actor

Like other Baltic states, Latvia perceives an increasing need for the EU to become more responsible for its own security, albeit while ensuring that NATO remains the backbone of European security. Approaching anything that could undermine American and NATO commitments to its security with utmost caution, Latvia was initially reluctant to participate in PESCO. Nonetheless, as long as PESCO enhances Latvian security and supplements NATO’s role, Riga will see the initiative as a useful a way to strengthen relations with its European allies.