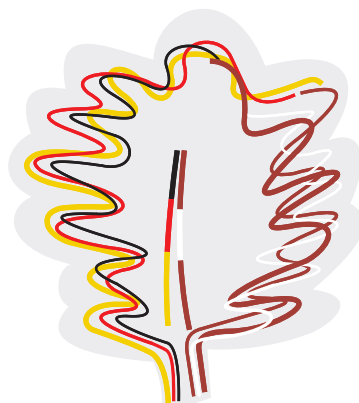


**2021 –
Thirty Years Since the Renewal
of Latvia's and Germany's
Diplomatic Relations**

Edited by Elisabeth Bauer,
Alexander Welscher and Ieva Jēkabsons



Deutschland - Lettland
1921-1991-2021
Latvija - Vācija



2021 – Thirty Years Since the Renewal of Latvia's and Germany's Diplomatic Relations

Articles by Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS)
Scholarship Holders in Latvia

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Foreword

Diplomatic relations between Latvia and Germany have always been very special. In 2021, both nations are celebrating the double anniversary of their diplomatic relations. On 28th August 1991, the newly reunited Germany was one of the first Western nations to grant international recognition to Latvia, which had only just finished the restoration period of its independence a week earlier.

However, 1991 was not the beginning of diplomatic relations between Germany and Latvia but rather their continuation, as they had been established for the first time a hundred years before. Therefore, in 2021, both countries are celebrating not only the 30th anniversary of the renewal of their diplomatic relations, but also the 100th anniversary since their establishment.

In 2020, the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung's Representation in the Baltic States reestablished a scholarship programme for bachelor's and master's level students in Latvia who are civically and socially engaged. Currently, there are ten KAS scholarship holders in Latvia.

In this collection, we wish to present the insights of our scholarship holders Kristaps Celmiņš, Jurgis Kalniņš, Gints Kapteiņš, Lora Egle, Nils Mosejonoks, Signe Viška and Aleksandrs Mironovs into the historical and cultural ties which have been connecting Germany and Latvia over the centuries.

Elisabeth Bauer
Head of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung office for the Baltic States



Signe Viška

is currently studying German Philology at the University of Latvia. She has recently debuted in children's literature and translation. Signe is also employed at the local radio station, *Radio NABA*, as the host of the *Bron-Hits* literature programme and is an editor at the *Konteksts* newspaper.

Signe Viška

Latvian Literature in Germany: a Hidden Treasure?

*Not doors do we open to come back home
but the covers of books.
(Māra Zālīte)¹*

Introduction

In 2018, I spent four months in Freiburg, Baden-Württemberg, as part of the Erasmus+ mobility program. In talking to Germans and friends from other countries, it was not uncommon to encounter surprise about the existence of Latvia, about it not being Lithuania or part of Russia, and that it does indeed have a language of its own. I patiently listed facts about my motherland *Wikipedia*-style: the area, population, capital, population of the capital, government structure, a brief history (who occupied what in which year), a little about the Song and Dance Festival, rye bread and the Midsummer *Jāņi* festival. A crash course in Latvia and being Latvian. Since I studied German philology within the exchange program, conversations about literature inevitably emerged, along with the question of which are the most famous pieces of Latvian literature that foreigners would know. Authors started spinning in my head, bright hardcovers flashed before my eyes, but I could not name a single piece that they would surely know in Germany. The task would have been much simpler had the tables been

¹ This poem is also quoted on the webpage of Matthias Knoll: *literatur.lv*

turned; it is hard to name one person who is genuinely interested in literature and who hasn't read at least one piece of writing by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (*Faust* is included in the school curriculum), Friedrich Schiller (are you even a citizen of the EU, if *Ode to Joy* has not been stuck in your head at least once?), Erich Maria Remarque (in Latvia his novel *Three Comrades* (*Drei Kameraden*, 1936) was reborn as a theatre production (Valmiera Drama Theater, 2006), as a ballet (The Latvian National Opera and Ballet, 2019), and there is another theatre production on the way to its premiere in autumn 2021 at the Dailes Theatre). The list of well-known German-speaking authors goes on. No doubt, Latvian classics and contemporary authors hide gems deserving worldwide fame among them. But the road from their motherland to readers abroad is not always quick or easy.

I decided to conduct a small study to find out about the availability of information about Latvian literature in Germany and the road of a Latvian book to a German publisher. Some of the questions are answered by Jayde Will, translator and literary agent of the *Latvian Literature* platform, a mediator between Latvian authors and German publishers. I also spoke to poet and translator Matthias Knoll, who has rendered over sixty Latvian books into German. With his vast experience, Matthias Knoll can be regarded as an ambassador of Latvian literature to Germany, and his insights provide another dimension to the understanding of Latvian literature in the German cultural space.

This study does not aim to position itself as revolutionary research or to describe the entire representation of Latvian literature in Germany. The first chapter introduces Latvian literature, its main themes and authors. The second chapter gives a brief insight into the relationship between Latvian and German literature and compares the number of translations of literature in both languages. The third chapter informs us about the export of Latvian literature, Latvian literature in Germany, and of the struggles involved. Information from the Will and Knoll interviews is used therein, providing a clearer and more personal insight into the topic as laid out by professionals. These conversations in full, are set out in the Appendix to this study.

The goal of the study is to provide a general and hopefully valuable insight into Latvian literature in the German cultural space and the availability of information about it. In the best-case scenario, the study will encourage readers to look for Latvian authors and translations of their work in German, and to find out more about the cultures, so closely connected for over a century.

Latvian literature 101: authors, themes, and translated works

Before diving into the relationships between Latvian and German literature, it is necessary to introduce the reader to the basics of Latvian literature, the most common topics and some of the works that are translated into other languages.

Let us begin with the definition: what *is* Latvian literature? There are several ways to approach this question. You could say that Latvian literature consists of works which are written by Latvian authors. Or, you could say that Latvian literature is all the writing that has originally been published in Latvian, and it could have been written by Russian, Lithuanian, Estonian etc. authors who are based in Latvia. My definition is a combination of both: Latvian literature consists of works by both Latvian and ethnically non-Latvian authors whose original publications are in Latvian or bilingual (two languages in one edition, for instance Latvian and Russian), or are written in a Latvian dialect. One of the most significant examples is the *Orbita* (Artūrs Punte, Vladmirs Svetlovs, Sergejs Timofejevs and Aleksandrs Zapoļs) Latvian-Russian poetry and multimedia art group, which was founded in Riga in 1999. Since then, they have been an active part of Latvia's cultural life with their performances, art installations and published books. *Orbita* mostly publishes contemporary poetry and prose by Latvian authors, and bilingual (Latvian-Russian) poetry collections by Russian-speaking authors. But there are also cases where a book has been originally written in Russian, then translated into Latvian, and published only in Latvian, e.g. *The Weeds Herbarium of Jērcēni Parish* (*Jērcēnu pagasta nezāļu herbārijs*, 2019) by Artūrs Punte. Besides literary works, *Orbita* also publishes art and photobooks which go beyond the usual borders of book design and also earn international recognition: in 2020, the *Glass Strenči* (*Stikla Strenči*) photobook was shortlisted for the Paris Photo–Aperture Foundation PhotoBook Awards.² The works and authors published by *Orbita* are also featured by *Latvian Literature*, Latvia's literature export platform. Therefore it is more than clear that it would be wrong not to consider Latvia-born Russian authors as a valid part of Latvian literature.

As mentioned before (but not going too far into details, as this should only be an introduction), dialects are also a part of the Latvian literature landscape. For instance, Latgalian (the opinions differ whether it is a language or a dialect) is spoken primarily in the region of Latgale, the south-eastern part of Latvia.

² *Announcing the 2020 PhotoBook Awards Shortlist*, Aperture, viewed 18 July 2021, <https://aperture.org/editorial/announcing-the-2020-photobook-awards-shortlist/>

Approximately 164,500 people speak Latgalian,³ and there are writers and poets who publish their work in Latgalian. It is worth mentioning that in recent years four authors writing in Latgalian have had their books nominated for the Annual Latvian Literature Awards (*Latvijas Literatūras gada balva*), which is the highest honour in the literary world of Latvia. In 2020, the bilingual poetry collection *Pādejais models / The Last Model*, translated by Jayde Will, was published in London. It contains poems in both Latgalian and English by four contemporary Latgalian authors. As the translator says in the introduction of the anthology: Latgalian is a viable, vibrant literature that has something to say not only to readers in Latvia, but also worldwide.⁴

Opinions, of course, differ regarding the main topics which are dealt with in Latvian literature. A significant number of novels that have been published in Latvia in the last 10 years deal with historical events in the 20th century: the formation of the Latvian state, World War I, World War II, the daily struggles of living in an occupied country, the strong feelings of nationalism, restoration of the independence of Latvia, etc. The *Dienas Grāmata* publishing house has published the historical fiction series *We. Latvia. The 20th Century* (Mēs. Latvija. 20. gadsimts): 13 books by 13 authors who approach different aspects of the last century. One of the novels, *The Taste of Lead* (*Svina garša*, 2015), was included in the *Dalkey Archive Press* anthology – Best European Fiction 2017,⁵ and several other books have been translated in multiple languages, for instance *Soviet Milk* (*Mātes Piens*, 2015) by Nora Ikstena, which was a bestseller in Latvia and has been translated into 15 languages. The German edition *Muttermilch* (*KLAK Verlag*) was translated by Nicole Nau and published in 2019. But authors also tackle traumatic historical experiences outside this particular series of books. For example, the novel *Five Fingers* (*Pieci pirksti*, 2013) by Māra Zālīte is a fictionalised childhood memoir in which the author describes her family's return from Siberia in the 1950s, and which has been translated into more than six languages.

Kaspars Zalāns, a poet of the younger generation, claims that it is typical for Latvian prose to evolve around three main topics: Latvian social problems (poverty and family violence), complicated relationships (where the man is often the villain), and historical trauma and heritage mostly dealing with the Soviet

³ Will, J. (2020): Introduction. In: Purinaša, L. et. al. *The Last Model / Pādejais Models*. London: Francis Boutle Publishers. P. 3.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Novel “*The Taste of Lead*” was included among the best prose works of 2017, Latvian Literature, viewed 18 July 2021, <https://latvianliterature.lv/en/news/novel-taste-of-lead-by-maris-berzins-included-among-the-best-prose-works-of-2017>

period.⁶ There is some truth in this, but Latvian literature is more than that. As Matthias Knoll describes it, “Latvian literature is a whole package, an entire literature from A to Z. (...) A vast, powerful and whole literature with a long history which caters to every taste.”

And now let us take a closer look at the relationship between Latvian and German literature.

Overview of the relationship between Latvian and German literature

Latvia and Germany go way back. The Baltic Germans had lived in the territory of Latvia since the 13th century AD,⁷ but in 1939-1940 the majority were forced to leave the country to move to the Third Reich. At that time, German schools were closed, German organizations and the German press prohibited, but it would be reckless to say that the movement of the Baltic Germans would substantially influence the fate of Latvian literature. Māra Grudule, researcher of Baltic German literature and professor at the University of Latvia's Faculty of Humanities, claims that Baltic German and Latvian literature have nearly no connection or interrelated influence.⁸ Yes, Baltic German literature does have an important cultural-historical heritage (the fact lives on to this day: at the University of Latvia, both the Bachelor's and Master's study programs of Baltic and German philology contain at least one mandatory course on Baltic German literature); but it has always coexisted alongside Latvian literature instead of being a part of it. One could mention some of the most influential Baltic German writers: Hermann von Keyserling, Werner Bergengruen, Gertrud von den Brinken, Elfride Eckardt-Skalberg (who translated Latvian poetry into German), Theodor Hermann Pantenius, Siegfried von Vegesack, and others. One of the legendary Latvian authors, Rūdolfs Blaumanis, was also Baltic German and wrote his first pieces in German, later switching to the Latvian language.

The facts mentioned above prove that the ties shared by the Latvian and German literary spaces are closely woven together, though subtle and complex. To obtain a clearer view of the countries' literary relationships, it is worth looking

⁶ Zalāns, K. (2021, February): vai atsaukties? *Domuzīme*, P. 48.

⁷ Cerūzis, R. (2021): *Vācbaltiešu izceļošana*. Nacionālā enciklopēdija, viewed 28 June 2021, <https://enciklopedija.lv/skirklis/101209-vācbaltiešu-izceļošana>

⁸ Grudule, M. (2005): *Vācbaltiešu literatūra (1890–1939)*. In: Kalnačs, B. et al.: *Vācu literatūra un Latvija, 1890–1945*. Apgāds Zinātne. P. 411–555.

at the books translated from German into Latvian and vice-versa. Literary researcher Jānis Oga, who has carried out extensive research on translations of Latvian literature, in his doctoral thesis *Literary Translation and the Latvian and European Cultural Identity Formation: Aspect of Creative Industries* (2014) explored the impact of literary translations on the formation of cultural identity and how they promote the recognizability of Latvian literature and the image of Latvia abroad. The appendix of the dissertation, *Most significant translations of Latvian literature in book format*, lists over 500 translations of Latvian literary works since 1892, including translations into German. In 2019, in writing my Bachelor thesis, I took an interest in Oga's studies and supplemented his data with the latest information from the platform *Latvian Literature*, thereby obtaining an informative overview on the translations of Latvian literature into other languages. Among those, German is the third most common target language (11%, or 69 book translations from 1898 to 2019⁹), and six more translations and publications in 2020,¹⁰ including a classic of Latvian literature, Edvarts Virza's novel *Straumēni*. The most convenient platform compiling older and newer translations of Latvian literature is the *latvianliterature.lv* website, but if a keen German reader searches Google for *Lettische Literatur*, the first results will be the Wikipedia page and outdated blog entries, so a good deal of effort is required to obtain the desired information.

The export of Latvian literature, its journey to German readers. Insights from Jayde Will and Matthias Knoll

According to its official website, the *Latvian Literature* platform “was established in order to promote recognition of Latvian literature and its distribution abroad, to ensure international cooperation among publishers, literary agents, writers, translators, and organizations working in the fields of literature and publishing”. Over the years, the activities of the platform have earned recognition not only in the context of literature but also broader culture and design. The visual identity of *Latvian Literature* made a breakthrough at the 2018 London Book Fair with the campaign *#iamintrovert*, when the Baltic States were the guests of honour. The author of the campaign *#iamintrovert* was Una Rozenbauma, the text author

⁹ Viška, S. (2019): *Übersetzung als Zeugin einer Epoche. Farbige Märchen von Imants Ziedonis in deutscher und englischer Sprache*, viewed 28 June 2021, <https://dspace.lu.lv/dspace/handle/7/47552>

¹⁰ Data from *latvianliterature.lv*, viewed 28 June 2021, <https://latvianliterature.lv/en/translations>

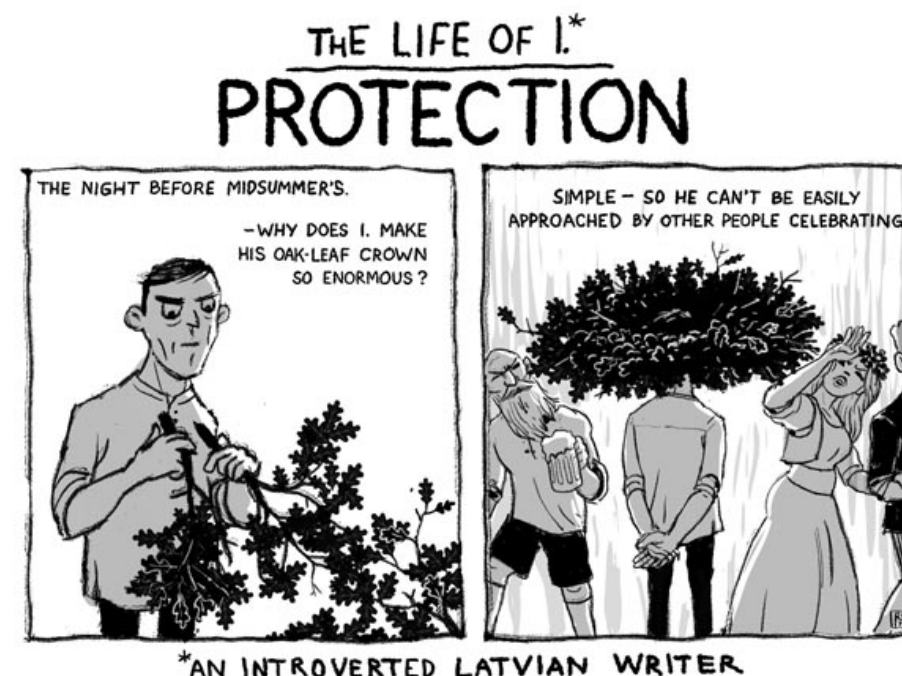


Figure 1. Comic The life of I. Protection. © Latvian Literature

was Anete Konste, and the visuals were developed by artist Reinis Pētersons. Latvian literature's central representative component was the cartoon figure I., or *Introvert Latvian writer*, playing ironically on the stereotype that Latvians (including Latvian writers) prefer solitude and text over humans (figures 1 and 2). The campaign has also been successful beyond the literary environment: *Latvian Literature* received the main prize for this at the *Latvian Festival of Creative Excellence Awards in 2018* and the *National Design Award of Latvia in 2019*. As a result of the successful campaign, the *Latvian Literature* platform was given the honour of representing Latvia at the London Design Biennale this year, which is a unique and considerable achievement for a literature-related organization.

The creation of the original visual image has led to recognition at book fairs, including the Frankfurt Book Fair. These fairs are a hub of active communication and introduce a country's literature. My major field of interest is the introduction of Latvian literature. Therefore, in talking to translator Jayde Will and poet and translator Matthias Knoll, I wanted to find out what German readers know about Latvian literature (if anything). In addition, to also find out who the German reader of Latvian literature is, and the availability of information about Latvian literature



Figure 2. Comic The life of I. Love Letter. © Latvian Literature

and its German translations. Translator Jayde Will has worked with the *Latvian Literature* platform ever since it was established. He is a literary agent and takes it upon himself to promote Latvian literature and maintain relationships with foreign publishers, including in Germany. He points out that prior to communicating with any publisher, but especially a German publisher, one has to carefully study the output of this publisher and their niche, if there is one. “In other words, do your homework on what they are publishing, get to know them, and don’t expect things to happen right away.” Will emphasizes that, for the time being, it is unclear if the German market has any preferences regarding Latvian literature as the number of books translated into German is still small, and one just has to wait.

Speaking about Latvian literature in Germany, both Will and Knoll point out that those German readers who already know about Latvian literature and are interested in it, have most probably been in touch with Latvian culture or have visited Latvia within some exchange program, and their interest in Latvian

literature has developed naturally along with a general interest in Latvian culture. This highlights an important problem which faces Latvian literature in Germany – books can be translated and published, but in itself, that does not guarantee the recognisability of those works. The *Latvian Literature* platform ensures a particular book’s way to a German publisher, but it cannot influence the further activities of this publisher. Knoll indicates that marketing is a chief factor in popularising Latvian (or any other) literature. If a Latvian book is translated, but published by a little-known minor publisher, only a small circle of people will know of its appearance and an even smaller circle may decide to read it and maybe write a review (which would most probably appear in some little-known media). Therefore, events like readings, discussions, meeting authors and translators are essential. This, in Knoll’s opinion, is the most important part, “And if it doesn’t happen exactly like that, with the human factor, then it doesn’t happen at all. That’s why answering the question of which Latvian author is known in Germany, I’d say, the answer is none. Because there is a lack of these activities that would promote Latvian literature and specific authors.” Still, it is important to mention that some German translations of Latvian literature are success stories, especially *Die Wilden Piroggenpiraten (Mežonīgie pīrāgi)* by Māris Putniņš, translated into German by Knoll himself. The translator points out that this is a fortunate case because the book was published by a large and well-respected publisher (*Fischer Verlag*), several thousand copies were sold and the book was nominated for the German Children’s Literature Award (*Deutscher Jugendliteraturpreis*). It should be mentioned that translations of children’s literature form an essential part of the export of Latvian literature. With respect to data about publisher *Liels un mazs* on translated children’s books during the past six years, we see 35 of this publisher’s books have been translated into 23 languages, with 81 editions in total.¹¹ The most translated title is the picture book *The Kiosk* by Anete Melece, which has been translated into 17 languages, including German. On June 26, 2021, an opera based on Melece’s book premiered in Düsseldorf.¹² Therefore, it would be premature to say that Latvian literature is totally invisible within the German cultural space, yet one has to agree with Knoll that marketing is crucial in popularising literature from small nations, while a lack of marketing can leave Latvian literature unnoticed. During our conversations, both Will and Knoll shared many interesting insights into Latvian literature, and they are available in full in the appendix to this study.

¹¹ Data from the infographic provided by the publisher’s *Facebook* page, viewed 18 July 2021, <https://www.facebook.com/lielsunmazs/posts/4117131498401823>

¹² Syrse, D. (2021): *Kulturfestival – der Kiosk*, viewed 18 July 2021, https://www.operamrhein.de/en_EN/repertoire/kulturinsfestival-der-kiosk.1278112

Conclusion

Overall, it can be said that Latvian literature is present in Germany (translations are available, they can be purchased online, reviews are appearing; in the case of *The Kiosk*, even a Latvian-book-based opera has been created), but one must be observant and deeply interested in literary processes in their native language as well, to even encounter something as specific as Latvian literature. Works of Latvian literature are translated into German, but there is a lack of publisher activity in promoting these works. Most often, Latvian literature enthusiasts are somehow connected to Latvia and the Baltics or are “fans of Latvia”, so the interest in literature accompanies a general interest in the culture of the country. Information on translations of Latvian literature in German is available but one must know where and how to look for it. However, one can hope that, as the *Latvian Literature* platform develops, the number of works translated into German will grow and find large publishing houses, giving the books a more prominent life on German readers’ bookshelves. Other nations with small languages most probably encounter similar problems, and Latvia is not unique in this respect. In any case, literature is one of the ways to promote intercultural communication and interest in other nations and languages. The Goethe-Institut could possibly help in popularising existing translations or foster new translations. There is also the annual European Union Prize for Literature which aims to increase the recognisability of contemporary European literature and promote its availability beyond its country of origin. Works by Latvian winners of this European prize could possibly be a good starting point for ensuring their translation into German as well as for relevant publicity. And that could lead to further developments.

Appendix

1. Conversation with Jayde Will

Signe Viška: How would you describe Latvian literature to someone who has never heard of our authors or even our country?

Jayde Will: I would of course say that it’s wonderful! However, more seriously, it depends on the person or publisher I am talking to. The most general thing one could perhaps start with is the number of translations that have come out over the past few years – more than 120 since 2016 in various languages. I think information like that can perhaps put the popularity of Latvian literature in perspective.

SV: How do you describe your experience working with German publishers?

JW: We have had a chance to go to the Leipzig Book Fair and Frankfurt Book Fair since 2016, and we have also had publisher visits to Riga, which have also included publishers from German-speaking countries. I feel it takes some time for publishers from those countries to warm to you. I have had countless people tell me that the mentality is rather conservative, and people don’t like quick changes, and thus it takes time for people to warm to you. I can say that with the publishing houses I have dealt with, it is rare to sell rights to them quickly, however this is not a knock against them – publishing is a difficult business, and I would also want to really know what I am taking on before I publish a book.

SV: What do they know about Latvia and Latvian literature?

JW: There haven’t been many translations of Latvian literature in other languages in general up until recently (except for perhaps languages like Swedish, where you have to give credit to the translator, Juris Kronbergs, who was instrumental in finding publishers and promoting the translations), so I feel that if anyone did know about Latvian literature, their interest is far deeper in the country than the average person, whether they are the descendants of Baltic Germans, or have studied Baltic philology, or done an exchange program in Latvia, or something of the sort.

SV: Is there something specific in Latvian literature that speaks to German (and not only German) publishers and readers?

JW: I can’t say at the moment, as there is such a small sample of translations into German in recent years. I really think we need another year or two to really understand whether there are any particular trends or tastes that are discernible. I do think that Latvian literature has a wide variety of things to offer, and with the German-speaking market being rather niche (meaning there are all sorts of niche things for all sorts of tastes), I think we have a chance to really show the breadth of Latvian literature.

SV: Is there something you have to keep in mind if you want to enter the German market? Maybe something that Latvian publishers should know?

JW: It takes work, and you have to get to know their catalogue, and really be specific about what you are offering. In other words, do your homework on what they are publishing, get to know them, and don’t expect things to happen right away. It is good advice for anyone in publishing, but it applies all the more so to the German-speaking market.

2. Conversation with poet, translator Matthias Knoll

Matthias Knoll has been known since the 1990s as a translator and publisher of Latvian literature. He is a member of the Latvian Writers Union and in 2019 was awarded the Latvian State's highest decoration, the Order of the Three Stars, for significant contributions to the promotion of Latvian culture in the world. Matthias is one of the first people to turn to if one is to talk about Latvian literature in Germany.

SV: How would you describe Latvian literature in brief?

MK: I'd say it is a whole package, an entire literature from A to Z. There are classics, folklore, modernism, expressionism, trivial literature and poetry. Latvian literature is a vast, powerful and whole literature with a long history which caters to every taste.

SV: Is there a Latvian author who could be called the most popular Latvian author in Germany, or their literary work?

MK: One must consider all German-reading people, let's say, together with Austria and Switzerland there are about 100 million. Of those 100 million, there are some that don't read at all, not even phonebooks. There are some for whom German is not the mother tongue, it is only the language of communication, they don't read in German. And a large number of those who do read German read, for example, pulp fiction. There is a whole array of factors, also regional, which impact reading habits, like the location of publishers and whether those publishers organize events, readings and meeting authors. It is a living, breathing process. You must feed it to the people that the book is so cool. You must be happy, pretty, fragrant, you have to go into the bookshop and convince the owner that this book right here must be ordered. And then he orders and sneaks it into the readers' [shopping carts], and so it happens. And if it doesn't happen exactly like that, with the human factor, then it doesn't happen at all. That's why the answer to the question of which Latvian author is known in Germany, I'd say, the answer is none. Because there is a lack of these activities that would promote Latvian literature and specific authors.

SV: But one could say that the *Latvian Literature* platform has taken upon themselves the function of promotion, haven't they?

MK: Yes, but you see, they [only] get to publishing houses. And from there it all happens within another cultural context and the *Latvian Literature* platform doesn't impact it anymore. They offer works to publishers, visit book fairs to talk to publishers and so on, but what happens afterwards is a whole different story.

If it is a publisher with a good name, there are reviews written about the books they publish and there is some sort of attention. But the small publishers work very regionally, they have their circle of friends related to the personality of the publisher and they sell 100 or 50 copies – well, I am not interested in that. I agreed to translate Inga Ābele's novel *Paisums (Die Flut)* for a small Swiss publishing house. And... it's absurd. There was one review. OK, there was another one in *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, but it was a bad review. But even good reviews can get lost if the publisher is small and unknown. For example, if there is a big publisher and a review on a big medium, like the same *Frankfurter Allgemeine*, it is a whole different deal. But some Swiss *Kumoderverlag*, which nobody has heard of...

SV: But is there a success story when a Latvian author's translation was noticed and earned more reviews and more attention?

MK: In my experience, the *Mežonīgie pīrāgi (Die Wilden Piroggenpiraten)* was quite successful, there were many reviews and blog entries published, blogger activity is also very important for the promotion of books. And the book was also nominated for the German Children's Literature Award (*Deutscher Jugendliteraturpreis*). Sold in several thousand copies, long story short, it took off very well. A big role, of course, was played by the fact that the publisher was large and well-respected, *Fischer Verlag*. Also, Valentīna Freimane's *Adieu, Atlantis (Wallstein Verlag)* and Sandra Kalniete's *Mit Ballschuhen im sibirischen Schnee (Herbig)* are examples of success stories. But for example, Gundega Repše's book *Unsichtbare Schatten* was sold in 900 copies, and that is a very small number.

SV: How available is the information on Latvian literature translations in German and how easy is it for German readers to access it?

MK: Why the hell should they do that? See – a person is interested in their own national literature, in good literature in their native tongue. These searches for other countries' literature are in fact activities of literary research. Or you are some sort of a fan of Latvia and then you already know where the specialized libraries are, so to say, you are at the source.



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Lora Egle

The Legacy of the Munster Latvia Gymnasium in Latvian Politics

Introduction

The origins of the Latvian diaspora in Germany can be found in 1944/1945 when the second Soviet occupation of Latvia was imminent. At first, the Latvians who fled from Soviet repression went mostly to Sweden and Germany, and then, many moved to the United States, Canada, Australia, and the United Kingdom. According to various sources, there were about 200,000 Latvian refugees in Germany in 1944/1945,¹ about 95,000 in 1947, and 20,000 in 1951. With international and local assistance, the Latvian refugees in Germany lived in displaced persons' camps. Most of the refugees were members of the intelligentsia in Latvia. A need for schools, therefore, arose and as it was clear that exile would continue after the Second World War, several Latvian schools were established around Germany. The Latvian schools were closed as time went on and more and more Latvians found ways to move overseas, and only one survived – the Munster Latvian Gymnasium. During the Soviet occupation of the Baltic States, the Munster Latvian Gymnasium became “the small Latvia” in the eyes of Latvians, as well as the German press.² The Munster Latvian Gymnasium schooled many leaders of Latvia after it regained its independence and in this article, we will examine how their studies in “the small Latvia” in exile affect Latvian politics and society today.

¹ Aija Lulle, “Latvieši ārzemēs,” Nacionālā enciklopēdija, <https://enciklopedija.lv/skirklis/21049>.

² Maija Sinka-Gobiņa, “«Mazā Latvija» trimdas Eiropā: Minsteres latviešu ģimnazija un Latviešu centrs Minsterē,” Barikadopēdija, <https://www.barikadopedija.lv/raksti/708839>.

Historical insight

The date February 14, 1946 is considered to be the beginning of the legendary Munster Latvian Gymnasium, which celebrated its 75th anniversary in 2021. The Munster Latvian Gymnasium developed from the Detmold Latvian Gymnasium, which was a school established in January 1946 by the Latvian Exile Council in Northern Germany and financed by German institutions. The 14th of February was the first school day for displaced Latvian children, and even though there were a lot of problems and a lack of school materials, there was joy in the air.³ The gymnasium already had to move to Augustdorf in November 1946 and the name was changed to the Augustdorf Latvian Gymnasium. The school's name Lettisches Gymnasium Münster appeared in 1957 when the gymnasium was moved to Munster, where German authorities converted a former military building for the needs of school. In the 1950s, the Munster Latvian Gymnasium remained as the only full-time Latvian school outside the territory of Latvia, and therefore, became the educational centre for the Latvian exile during the Soviet occupation. The conditions of the previous refugee school and later minority school within the German educational system were advantageous, as it allowed for the gymnasium to be run according to Latvian principles for many years. Basically, the gymnasium was the only structure directly inherited from Latvia, and as long as it functioned, it kept the feeling and belief that Latvia's independence could and had to be restored alive.⁴ The gymnasium's program corresponded to the German gymnasium standard. However, as a minority school, it had special exceptions such as the possibility of also taking the final exams in the Latvian language. Until the late 1970s, the gymnasium provided education from Year 1 to Year 13, but due to changes in the German educational system and on becoming a bilingual school, from 1979 the gymnasium operated from Year 7 to Year 13.

The Munster Latvian Gymnasium existed from 1946 till 1998, and throughout the period of Latvia's occupation and the Cold War, it was like a small Latvia in the territory of Germany. And the German authorities kept relations with the gymnasium as if it indeed was like a representation of Latvia. The existence of the only minority school in the world that was teaching in the Latvian language was highly dependent on the goodwill of German authorities.

³ Alberts Spoģis, *Minsteres latviešu ģimnāzija izdzīvoja*. Valters un Rapa: 2008, 4.

⁴ "Minsteres latviešu ģimnāzija 1945 - 1998. Atskats uz sevišķu skolu," Izstāde Rīgā, Dailes teātrī 19.-30.10.1999.

At the beginning, the Germans were not as supportive as they were later and only the British, in whose zone the school was located, persuaded Germany to let Latvian displaced persons have their own gymnasium.⁵ After the formation of West Germany in 1949, there was an agreement made within the treaty between the Americans, British, French and West Germany that West Germany would ensure the protection of displaced people (mostly Baltic and Eastern European refugees). To implement the agreement, West Germany adopted a law in 1951 about the status of people without a homeland (*Heimatloser Ausländer*), that included Latvians.⁶ This law provided Latvians with all rights, excluding political ones, which meant that the law protected their rights to education. In this way, a legal basis for the existence of the Munster Latvian Gymnasium was established.

The gymnasium obtained its own building too in the 1960s, when the Munster municipality constructed a new building for the Latvian gymnasium. By this time, the German authorities had recognized the importance of the Latvian gymnasium and the Minister of Labour and Social Affairs of the state of North Rhine-Westphalia, Konrad Grundmann, emphasized in his opening speech that the Munster Latvian Gymnasium was a small part of the Latvian homeland and the opening of its own new building was an act of European history.⁷ Mr Grundmann also mentioned that the Germans understood what it meant to live without freedom, and that it created solidarity between the German and Latvian nations. He also expressed the will that students of the Munster Latvian Gymnasium would learn the value of freedom and a strong spirit.⁸ Thus, solidarity – one of the European Union values – was the driving motivation for Germany to support a Latvian gymnasium while Latvia was occupied.

It is important to note that the gymnasium was mostly financed as a private school by both the federal government of Germany and the state of North Rhine-Westphalia, and it was the only Latvian school in the world of its kind. And, even though it was a problem to guarantee the number of school children the German authorities required (the numbers were changing, but at least 10 pupils on

⁵ Agnese Drunka, "Kāpēc leģendārā Minsteres ģimnāzija latviešu jauniešiem bija tik svarīga? Trimdinieku atmiņas," lsm.lv, <https://www.lsm.lv/raksts/dzive--stils/vesture/kapec-legendar-minsteres-gimnazija-latviesu-jauniesiem-bija-tik-svariga-trimdinieku-atminas>.

⁶ Egils Levits in an interview with the author, 28/6/2021, Riga, Latvia.

⁷ Alberts Spoģis, *Minsteres latviešu ģimnāzija izdzīvoja*. Valters un Rapa: 2008, 43.

⁸ "Rīgas atslēgas latviešu rokas," *Latvija Amerikā*, 06/03/1965, <https://periodika.lv/periodika2-viewer/?lang=fr#panel:pa|issue:137174|article:DIVL278|query:MINSTERES%20Minstere%20Grundmans%20Minsteres%20>

average in one class), they kept supporting the gymnasium as its value was more important. A significant job was done for Latvians regarding the preservation of their historical memory and a constant reminder about the law that protected the rights of people without a homeland (1951).⁹ Latvian exile organisations put a lot of effort into reminders about Nazi Germany's role in the Soviet occupation of the Baltic States and the moral responsibility of West Germany. In this way, the German authorities were persuaded about the significance of the Munster Latvian Gymnasium for Latvians in exile.

Additionally, as graduate and former teacher of the gymnasium Aija Ebdens states, having the Latvian gymnasium in Munster made the town well-known throughout the world, as every Latvian in exile knew where Munster was.¹⁰ Munster attracted many Latvian visitors and their friends, and hundreds of Latvian events were organized in Munster, including an annual European Summer School and summer courses for Latvians worldwide at the Munster Latvian Gymnasium. The World Federation of Free Latvians also organized the cultural festival Song Days (*Dziesmu dienas*) in Munster twice (1984 and 1987), and the number of Latvians who visited Munster was very significant for the city. There were 1,800 beds available in Munster's hotels in 1984, which was insufficient for the approximately 5,000 Latvians who were expected to arrive. Therefore, the assistance of schools, which could provide rooms, and the Red Cross, which could ensure beds, was important.¹¹ Thus, there were also material benefits for Munster of having a Latvian gymnasium.

Latvians truly valued the support to the gymnasium, calling it a present from the German government.¹² By this time, graduates of the Munster Latvian Gymnasium were given the opportunity to study at German universities, as they were awarded with an abitur, which was special considering that studies at the gymnasium were conducted in both Latvian and German. In the 1970s, West Germany kept providing support to the Munster Latvian Gymnasium and allowed young Latvians from all around Europe to study at the gymnasium and even financed their studies, creating a European Latvian Gymnasium in this way. Later on, Latvian youngsters from all around the world were welcome to study at the Munster Latvian Gymnasium, and in the 1970s, it became popular for Latvians

⁹ Egils Levits in an interview with the author, 28/6/2021, Riga, Latvia.

¹⁰ Aija Ebdens in an interview with the author, 17/06/2021, Riga, Latvia.

¹¹ "Dziesmu dienas Mīnsterē," Pasaules Brīvo Latviešu Dziesmu Dienu Avīze (Mīnsterē), 31/08/1984, <https://periodika.lv/periodika2-viewer/?lang=fr#panel:pa|issue:397341|article:DIVL28|query:Minster%C4%93%20latvie%C5%A1u%20%C4%A3imn%C4%81zijas%20>

¹² Alberts Spogis, *Mīnsteres latviešu ģimnāzija izdzīvoja*. Valters un Rapa: 2008, 55.

in the US and Australia to send their children to study at the Munster Latvian Gymnasium.

Many Latvian youngsters from overseas used the opportunity to study at the Munster Latvian Gymnasium for just one year (Year 13) after finishing high school in their home country, to experience Latvian education in Europe. One-year students did not receive an abitur, as it was only given to students who finished at least two years of study (12 and 13). Opening up the gymnasium to all exiled Latvians increased donations and the number of pupils. However, the Germans provided up to 90% of the financial support, while the other share was provided by Latvians in exile.¹³

After the collapse of the Soviet Union and the restoration of Latvia's independence in 1991, the first teachers and pupils from Latvia came to the Munster Latvian Gymnasium. At the same time, the interest of the Latvian diaspora in supporting the gymnasium declined as it was possible to return to, or study, in Latvia. Moreover, Latvians coming from Latvia were more interested in entering Western universities after finishing the Munster Latvian Gymnasium, as this was not possible with a Latvian high school diploma, and the gymnasium's goals were not their priority. In the 1990s, the financial situation without donations from the Latvian diaspora was difficult, and German institutions no longer saw reasons for supporting a Latvian refugee gymnasium when Latvia was independent. Moreover, Germany had its own financial struggles after reunification. Therefore, due to the lack of finance and students from the Latvian diaspora, the Latvian community in Germany and the Latvian Centre in Munster, together with the German authorities, made the decision to close the Munster Latvian Gymnasium in 1998.

After closing the school, the place did not stay empty, as the Latvian Centre in Munster, which was established in 1982 and had opened its own building in 1986, still operates there today. The Latvian Centre in Munster unites the Latvians of the region – there were about 8,500 living in the state of North Rhine-Westphalia in 2018¹⁴ – and offers various types of activities regarding the Latvian identity. The centre also preserves archival materials about the Munster Latvian Gymnasium. During the decades of its existence, the Munster Latvian Gymnasium was much more than a school for Latvians in exile. The gymnasium

¹³ Viesturs Sprūde, "Dzimtenes stūrītis un vieta, kur ieaudzināt latviskumu! Mīnsteres Latviešu ģimnāzijas stāsts," Latvijas Avīze, <https://www.la.lv/dzimtenes-sturitis-un-vieta-kur-ieaudzinat-latviskumu-minsteres-latviesu-gimnazijas-stasts>.

¹⁴ Statistisches Jahrbuch Nordrhein-Westfalen 2019, <https://webshop.it.nrw.de/gratis/Z026%20201900.pdf>.

slowed the assimilation of many Latvians, kept the Latvian language, traditions, identity, and the idea of a free Latvia alive. It kept reminding Germany and other countries about Latvia, which had been illegally occupied by the Soviet Union. It schooled today's Latvian leaders and activists, influencing their perspective and values.

The mission and politics of the Munster Latvian Gymnasium

The Munster Latvian Gymnasium was not just a school; it was a societal, cultural, and political centre for Latvians worldwide. The gymnasium functioned as a boarding school and in the 1970s and 1980s, it gathered together young Latvians from all around the world. The boarding school created the conditions for living in a Latvian environment 24/7, fostering the students to become “professional Latvians” in this way.¹⁵ It was expensive to send Latvian pupils to study in Germany, especially from overseas, but Latvians recognized the value of the Munster Latvian Gymnasium's education and environment. The location of the gymnasium in Munster, Germany had a positive effect on the students. They learned Western democratic principles while strengthening their Latvian identity, they acquired the volunteering virtue and the ability to think about the common good from Germans, and they established friendships and relationships for their entire lives.

Solveiga Silkalna, the current Foreign Affairs Adviser to the President of Latvia, mentions that her parents met at the Munster Latvian Gymnasium where they both worked as teachers. Solveiga and her brother Nils were born within the family, and both attended the Munster Latvian Gymnasium for several years. Solveiga Silkalna states that she attended the gymnasium from age five to seven when her father Eduards Silkalns was the director of the gymnasium (1975 – 1978). Her memories from that time are already connected with fighting for a free Latvia, and the fighting spirit was already taught from Year One.¹⁶

And indeed, political education and activism was an important asset of the Munster Latvian Gymnasium. As the Soviet occupation of Latvia continued, Latvians in exile were worried that the Latvian identity and language would disappear within the next few generations. Therefore, they worked and acted

¹⁵ Valters Nollendorfs in an interview with the author, 17/6/2021, Riga, Latvia.

¹⁶ Solveiga Silkalna in an interview with the author, 18/6/2021, Riga, Latvia.



Graduate class of 1989. The director Valters Nollendorfs is first from the left. Photo from the personal archive of Mr Nollendorfs.

to try to influence public opinion in the countries in which they lived, including Germany. In fact, the Munster Latvian Gymnasium was the organisational centre for Latvian political demonstrations in Germany.¹⁷ For example, the pupils of the Munster Latvian Gymnasium were involved in the preparation of posters and participation in a demonstration on the day of human rights in Bonn in 1978 and during Brezhnev's visit to Bonn in 1981.

The pupils of the Munster Latvian Gymnasium were active and creative in political demonstrations against the Soviet Union and communism, and the Latvian community in Munster was even referred to as the core of the political demonstrations.¹⁸ A graduate of the gymnasium, Anna Muhka, thinks that the people of Munster were better informed about the Soviet occupation of the Baltic countries than the average German anywhere else, due to the political activism of the pupils.¹⁹ Thus, it is likely that the people of Munster had a comprehension of and sympathy towards the local Latvian community. Perhaps due to this

¹⁷ “Latvieši pasaulē” muzejs un pētniecības centrs, *Nyet, Nyet Soviet. Stāsti par latviešu politiskajām demonstrācijām trimdā*, “Latvieši pasaulē” muzejs un pētniecības centrs: 2018, 103.

¹⁸ Ibid, 133.

¹⁹ Ibid, 105.

understanding, German institutions were so consistent in their support for the existence of the Munster Latvian Gymnasium. Anita Zakatistova, a graduate of the gymnasium, considers that Latvians were also known about outside Munster and that overall people in Germany knew what Latvia was because of this active participation in political demonstrations.²⁰

Latvian youngsters studying at the Munster Latvian Gymnasium and living in the Latvian community also learned patriotism and a willingness to fight for a free Latvia and to remind others about the Soviet occupation. As typical young people, they were energetic, creative, and brave, and got involved in such political actions as drawing graffiti on the Berlin Wall, as well as international actions, such as the political demonstration during the European Security and Cooperation Conference in Madrid, Spain in 1980. The graduates of the Munster Latvian Gymnasium kept the patriotic spirit alive and continued to organize and participate in political demonstrations after returning from Germany as well. Ivars Slokenbergs states that the year of studying at the Munster Latvian Gymnasium inspired and motivated him to act on spreading the message about occupied Latvia in the US as well.²¹ He participated in the organisation of a campaign where people were chained to the gates of the Soviet Union's embassy in Washington DC in 1985, the staged hanging next to the consulate of the Soviet Union in New York in 1986 and other demonstrations, to remind the world about occupied Latvia and its political prisoners.

The pupils of the Munster Latvian Gymnasium not only participated in demonstrations, but also attended political seminars organized every year for the older students. Within these seminars, there were papers presented on Latvian political and historical issues, as well as discussions and lectures about Latvia and Europe. The youngsters were keen to learn more about issues regarding Latvia, and one of the likely reasons may have been that students at the Munster Latvian Gymnasium had connections with Latvians in occupied Latvia. As former director Valters Nollendorfs emphasizes, there was no official travel to Latvia organized by the gymnasium, but the youngsters managed to travel to Latvia anyway. It was even said that if you have not been to Latvia, then you are not a Latvian.²² Travelling to occupied Latvia was dangerous for an exiled Latvian due to the possible interrogation or repression by the Committee for State Security (KGB).

²⁰ "Latvieši pasaulē" muzejs un pētniecības centrs, *Nyet, Nyet Soviet. Stāsti par latviešu politiskajām demonstrācijām trimdā*, "Latvieši pasaulē" muzejs un pētniecības centrs: 2018, 288.

²¹ Ibid, 175.

²² Valters Nollendorfs in the interview to the author, 17/6/2021, Riga, Latvia.

However, young Latvians took the risk and went to Latvia as tourists, participants at cultural events, etc. The patriotic and political education of young Latvians was crucial for the survival of the idea of Latvia and for keeping other countries informed about the illegal Soviet occupation. Moreover, the Munster Latvian Gymnasium schooled Latvian youngsters, who today are leaders and promote relations between Latvia and Germany.

The Munster Latvian Gymnasium preparing today's Latvian leaders

The Munster Latvian Gymnasium has schooled about 2,000 young Latvians (including graduates with an abitur and one-year students, as well as students who attended but did not graduate) and many of them moved to Latvia after the restoration of independence or are active in Latvian societies abroad, working on preserving the Latvian identity of the current diaspora and facilitating its connections to Latvia in this way. Many of the graduates who moved to Latvia continue to be socially and politically active, and they maintain relations with other previous students of the Munster Latvian Gymnasium, as well as Germany and Munster itself. Solveiga Silkalna, the Foreign Affairs Advisor to the President of Latvia, says that Germany and Munster feel like home because her mother grew up in Germany, and she associates her parents and grandparents with Germany and visits other Latvians throughout Germany.²³

A graduate and former teacher at the Munster Latvian gymnasium, Aija Ebden, states that graduates created a community that is active and still maintains close relations.²⁴ She mentions several well-known graduates and teachers who have moved to Latvia and have contributed to the common good there. They are: Paulis Apinis, who was the first head of the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung in the Baltic States; Anna Muhka – Head of Corporate Communications at the National Library of Latvia; Neil Ebden – the chairperson of the Latvian community in Germany and owner of the *Ebden Reisen* travel agency, which promotes German tourism to Latvia; Valdis Labinskis – a member of the Līvāni municipality council; Dainis Mjartāns – chairman of the official publisher *Latvijas Vēstnesis* and World Latvian Art Centre in Cēsis; dean Klāvs Bērziņš – established the Riga Evangelical Lutheran congregation; Kārlis Streips – a journalist and lecturer

²³ Solveiga Silkalna in an interview with the author, 18/6/2021, Riga, Latvia.

²⁴ Aija Ebden in an interview with the author, 17/6/2021, Riga, Latvia.

at the University of Latvia; the diplomats Imants Gross, Pēteris Elferts (1961 – 2021) and Rolands Lappuķe; politician Māris Graudiņš, the former Executive Director of the Soros Foundation in Latvia Andris Aukmanis; Vita Anda Tērauda – an ex-Minister of Reforms and a current member of the Parliament of the Republic of Latvia.

Kārlis Streips, who is a well-known journalist in Latvia, after graduation from the Munster Latvian Gymnasium, wrote that the year he spent at the gymnasium was the most interesting and valuable year of his life until then.²⁵ He went to Munster after finishing high school in the US without great expectations, but after one year he felt that he had grown enormously and made friends for life. After graduating in 1978, Kārlis Streips was so inspired that he wrote a call for every young Latvian to come to the Munster Latvian Gymnasium without any doubts. And some Latvian youngsters, indeed, did not have any doubt about studying at the Munster Latvian Gymnasium and one of them is a current member of the Parliament of Latvia, Vita Anda Tērauda. In fact, studying at the Munster Latvian Gymnasium was Vita Tērauda's long-term goal, which included some hard work convincing her parents to let her go alone from the US to study in Munster at the age of 16.²⁶

Vita Tērauda has always tried to find ways to be active with respect to her Latvian identity, and studying at Munster Latvian Gymnasium strengthened her Latvian roots and willingness to devote her time to work for Latvia, even though it was occupied back then, and there was no real hope of restoring independence in the near future in the 1970s.²⁷ After a year in Munster, Vita Tērauda returned to the US and with fresh inspiration, continued to study and work within institutions related to Latvia such as the Latvian study centre in Michigan and Latvian broadcasts on radio through Voice of America. Vita Tērauda emphasizes that the Munster Latvian Gymnasium widened her perspective, enriched her language knowledge, and most importantly “made her European”,²⁸ meaning she learnt European values, the mindset, and the way of living. And once Latvia was on its way to the restoration of its independence, Vita Tērauda moved to Latvia to contribute and later worked in state institutions, becoming the Minister of Reforms in 1994. In the late 1990s, and until her election to the Parliament of Latvia, Vita Tērauda

²⁵ “Minsteres latviešu ģimnāzija 1945 -1998. Atskats uz sevišķu skolu,” Izstāde Rīgā, Dailes teātrī 19.-30.10.1999.

²⁶ Vita Anda Tērauda in an interview with the author, 28/6/2021, Riga, Latvia.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.



In the middle of the first row, director Eduards Silkalns, above him Kārlis Streips (1977/1978). Photo from the archive of the Latvian community in Germany (Lettische Gemeinschaft in Deutschland e.V.).

was an active worker in the non-government sector, promoting good governance, the rule of law, media politics, etc.

The list of well-known graduates of the Munster Latvian Gymnasium is long, but one should mention the graduates that every Latvian knows, and of whom every graduate of the Munster Latvian gymnasium is proud. The current Prime Minister of Latvia Arturs Krišjānis Kariņš and the President of Latvia Egils Levits are two of them. Mr Egils Levits was not only a graduate of the gymnasium, but worked there as a teacher. When Mr Krišjānis Kariņš became Prime Minister, interesting facts were revealed. Mr Levits was one of Mr Kariņš' teachers at the Munster Latvian Gymnasium and stated that Mr Kariņš has been his best student in politics and history, and that this is still visible today.²⁹ Thus, the current main political leaders of Latvia were schooled at the Munster Latvian Gymnasium, and the influence of the gymnasium on their approach towards politics can be observed.

²⁹ Māra Rozenberga, “Levits savulaik bijis Kariņa skolotājs,” lsm.lv, <https://www.lsm.lv/raksts/zinas/latvija/levits-savulaik-bijis-karina-skolotajs.a320822/>.



Egils Levits as a teacher, together with colleague Valentīna Lasmane and student Andris Ansis Rūtiņš (1983/1984). Photo from the archive of the Latvian community in Germany (Lettische Gemeinschaft in Deutschland). e.V.)

A former director of the Munster Latvian Gymnasium, Valters Nollendorfs has observed that Prime Minister Kariņš works according to the best principles of US democracy and pragmatism, as Mr Kariņš was born and grew up in the US. But his Latvian identity and approach was strengthened at the Munster Latvian Gymnasium.³⁰ Prime Minister Kariņš happened to be studying at the gymnasium at the time when the current President of Latvia was a teacher of history and politics there. Egils Levits remembers that Mr Kariņš was a great student in history and politics and got actively involved in discussions, and Mr Levits emphasizes that Mr Kariņš was one of the students that he remembers best.³¹

Due to their experience of living in exile, President Levits and Prime Minister Kariņš share a common understanding of Latvian diaspora issues, especially when talking about the exiled generations. Mr Levits' Adviser on Foreign Affairs, Solveiga Silkalna, also states that the President has a great ability for understanding the thinking and attitudes of the Latvian diaspora. Moreover, in her opinion, the origins of Mr Levits' interest in state rights and state will, can be

³⁰ Valters Nollendorfs in an interview with the author, 17/6/2021, Riga, Latvia.

³¹ Egils Levits in an interview with the author, 28/6/2021, Riga, Latvia.



In the middle Krišjānis Kariņš, next to the right Dainis Mjartāns. Photo from Ģirts Zēgners' private archive 1983/1984.

found from the time he spent in Munster, in Latvian education and the patriotic environment.³² It is also likely that President Levits' active position on the freedom of speech, media freedom and strong democracy formed during the time he spent in Germany, having been influenced by Western democratic standards.

Mr Levits' family moved to Germany at the beginning of the 1970s when his family, with its Jewish roots, was allowed to leave the Soviet Union to go to Israel. However, the family chose to go to Levits' parents' relatives in Germany. President Levits himself says that after leaving the Soviet Union and starting his studies at the Munster Latvian Gymnasium, a whole new range of literature was available to him and he used the opportunities to read about history and politics, which affected his approach and perspective towards these issues.³³ At the gymnasium, the President enjoyed humanities subjects such as politics, history and Latvian language the most, and he describes studying at the Munster Latvian Gymnasium as "the information push" that directed him into the alternative Latvia in the exile.³⁴ Mr Levits also acquired many

³² Solveiga Silkalna in an interview with the author, 18/6/2021, Riga, Latvia.

³³ Egils Levits in an interview with the author, 28/6/2021, Riga, Latvia.

³⁴ Ibid.

friends with whom he is still in touch, and participated in the work of Latvian exile organizations, especially the European Latvian Youth Association (ELYA) where he was one of the leaders. ELYA was the beginning of President Levits' political activities. Mr Levits acquired crucial skills such as cooperation, project management, and debating within Latvian exile organizations. The global environment of these organizations which facilitated cooperation and discussions between the countries in which most Latvians resided – Germany, Sweden, the UK, the US, Canada, and Australia – expanded and enriched his worldview and knowledge.

President Egils Levits is convinced that the Munster Latvian Gymnasium schooled many people who returned to Latvia when it was possible and contributed to the country's development. Their contribution was especially significant in the 1990s after the restoration of independence, because an objective independent perspective was important to carry out the reforms and regain the historical memory of Latvia.³⁵ Moreover, the graduates of the Munster Latvian Gymnasium and other exiled Latvians brought democratic experiences from Western countries that added to the democratic changes in Latvia.

Impact on Germany-Latvia bilateral relations

The German support to the Munster Latvian Gymnasium was a very positive aspect within German-Latvian relations, says Solveiga Silkalna, the Foreign Affairs Adviser to the President of Latvia.³⁶ After the restoration of Latvia's independence, the Munster Latvian Gymnasium functioned as an intermediary between German and Latvian politicians. For instance, in 1995 German politicians – the Minister of Culture of the state of North Rhine-Westphalia Hans Schwier, and members of the state's parliament Ruprecht Polenz and Winni Nachtwei – visited the 50th graduation ceremony of the Munster Latvian Gymnasium, where they met with Māris Gailis, then Prime Minister of Latvia, and other representatives of government. The mayor of Munster, Marion Thun, was also present at the ceremony and in her speech, she emphasized that the Munster Latvian Gymnasium was a special school and the city of Munster has always supported its continuity.³⁷

³⁵ Egils Levits in an interview with the author, 28/06/2021, Riga, Latvia.

³⁶ Solveiga Silkalna in an interview with the author, 18/06/2021, Riga, Latvia.

³⁷ Alberts Spoģis, *Minsteres latviešu ģimnāzija izdzīvoja*. Valters un Rapa: 2008, 461.



50th graduation ceremony of the Munster Latvian Gymnasium on 17/6/1995. First row from left: Andra Levita (doctor and wife of Egils Levits), Egils Levits, Vita Anda Tērauda, Māris Gailis, Indra Sāmīte, born Lielkāja (graduate of the Munster Latvian Gymnasium in 1978 and Minister of Finance in the cabinet of Māris Gailis), Vilnis Zaļkalns. Photo from the personal archive of Ģirts Zēgners.

The graduates of the Munster Latvian Gymnasium tend to have warm memories and positive associations with Germany that function as an element of Germany's public diplomacy and soft power. Moreover, the graduates have learned the German language and that has appeared to be a facilitating facet of German-Latvian political relations. For instance, people in both Latvia and Germany noticed the great German knowledge of Prime Minister Kariņš when he first officially visited Germany and met Chancellor Angela Merkel.³⁸ Perhaps the Prime Minister's good knowledge about Germany and its language fostered cooperation between the politicians. It should be added that the current President of Latvia, Egils Levits, also speaks fluent German and served as the first ambassador to Germany and Austria after the restoration of Latvia's independence, which shows that studying at the Munster Latvian Gymnasium and being active in Latvian exile organisations was a kickstart for his further political career in Latvia.

³⁸ "Sarunā ar Angeli Merkeli Kariņš demonstrē lieliskas vācu valodas zināšanas," nra.lv, <https://nra.lv/video/7326-saruna-ar-angeli-merkeli-karins-demonstre-lieliskas-vacu-valodas-zinasanas.htm>.

Both Latvian leaders have in-depth knowledge about Germany and the German way of thinking, and all the graduates of the Munster Latvian Gymnasium together create a community that knows Germany well, which fosters Latvian-German cooperation on different levels. Perhaps Germany should take advantage of the Munster Latvian Gymnasium's influence on today's Latvian leadership and use this facet to strengthen its soft power while implementing foreign policy goals and deepening its cooperation with Latvia.

Moreover, it is not only Germany as a state that has good bilateral relations with Latvia. There are also special ties between the City of Munster and Latvia due to the Munster Latvian Gymnasium. After the restoration of Latvia's independence, closer relations between Latvia and Munster developed, especially in education. The first conference of Latvian universities happened in cooperation with the University of Munster. Moreover, conferences for Latvian teachers in Munster and Latvia, with the assistance of Munster Municipality and several schools in Munster, were organized to help reform the education system in Latvia in the 1990s.³⁹ This cooperation and the conferences were of significant assistance in the reorganization of the education system in Latvia. The cooperation in education has also continued with teacher exchange projects allowing German lecturers to work at Latvian higher education institutions, and Latvian lectures at German ones. There is also a summer school organised by the Latvian Centre in Munster and the Goethe-Institut which provides an opportunity for Latvian students to learn the German language and to acquire a certificate.

Munster's role in relations between Latvia and Germany is still relevant today. In 2015, the Europa Union Munster's prize of Coudenhove-Kalergi-Plakette was given to Baltic leaders in Munster – to Prof. Dr. Vytautas Landsbergis, Dainis Īvāns and Trivimi Velliste – for leading the Singing Revolution in the Baltic States. The Singing Revolution was a peaceful, non-violent movement in the territories of the Soviet occupied Baltic countries that led to the restoration of the independence of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. It has been said that these events in the Baltic countries fostered geopolitical changes and were the preceding events to the fall of the Berlin Wall.⁴⁰ The City of Munster has also recognized that the current President and Prime Minister of Latvia studied at the Munster Latvian Gymnasium

³⁹ "Minsteres latviešu ģimnāzija 1945 -1998. Atskats uz sevišķu skolu," Izstāde Rīgā, Dailes teātrī 19.-30.10.1999.

⁴⁰ "Europa-Union Münster ehrt die "Singende Revolution"," Europa Union Deutschland, <https://www.europa-union.de/ueber-uns/meldungen/aktuelles/europa-union-muenster-ehrt-die-singende-revolution>.

and is proud of this connection.⁴¹ Munster has a special place in the hearts of the graduates of the Munster Latvian Gymnasium and other exiled Latvians, and this relationship is mutual.

It can, indeed, be concluded that the Munster Latvian Gymnasium was a special school, schooling great people who have contributed to Latvia's development and Latvian-German relations. One can only guess where the many students of the Munster Latvian Gymnasium and exiled Latvians would be without the gymnasium and its contribution to the survival of the idea of a free Latvia and Latvian identity. Without Germany's solidarity and constant support, as well as the hard work of Latvians in explaining the need for a Latvian Gymnasium in Germany, things may have developed differently. It is a complicated task to measure the impact of the gymnasium to Latvia and Latvian-German relations, but one can say that the impact was positive and still influences the politics of Latvia today. Dankeschön, Deutschland!

⁴¹ Darta Sils, "Lettische Staatsmänner lernten in Münster," Münstersche Zeitung, <https://www.muensterschezeitung.de/lokales/staedte/muenster/lettische-staatsmaenner-lernten-in-munster-1113452?pid=true>.



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German Heritage in the Appealing Beauty of the Riga Cityscape from the Time of the Hanseatic League (12th-17th Century)

Introduction

The architectural link between Latvia and Germany began to appear vividly at the beginning of the 13th century as a result of the Roman Catholic Church's decision to spread Christianity throughout Europe, expanding the extent of the church's influence and eradicating paganism (the belief in a multitude of "false" gods that usually tie nature and supernatural powers together) in this way. As more European tribes converted to Christianity at that time, the Baltic region became known as the last pagan area on the European map. This led to the inclusion of the Baltic lands on the list of targets for the Crusades.

The Crusaders, who began arriving in the Latvian lands in the 12th century, came mostly from areas of Germany and thus brought German culture and traditions with them. Ikšķile or Uexküll, as it was better known in German back then, was chosen as the centre for Christianity in the Latvian lands. Its location was geographically in the heart of the Baltics, approximately 30 km from the Gulf of Riga on the Daugava River. Ikšķile's church, the first stone building in Latvian territory, was constructed for commencing missionary activities. However, as access to it was not sufficiently secure for the Crusaders (their ships were often attacked by Latvian tribes as the Crusaders made the 30 km trip to Ikšķile along the Daugava River), Bishop Albert moved the centre of Catholicism to a more

convenient place that was closer to the sea, and established a new city, Riga, in 1201. The development of the city began at that time, establishing the architectural link with Germany.

In 1282, Riga became a member of the Hanseatic League (Hansa) – an influential defence and commercial confederation of Northern European towns and merchant guilds that included most of the cities in the Netherlands, Northern Germany, Scandinavia and the Baltics. Due to the strong ties between the cities and the many similarities that they shared, the ones within the alliance developed certain architectural similarities – gothic architecture with the domination of high gable roofs, and red bricks as the main building material. The shapes of the buildings were unique to and similar for Hansa members. As the main aim of the Hansa was to ensure freer trade, most Hanseatic cities created so-called *kontors* – trade buildings, warehouses, and facilities used for trade by foreign and locally based merchants. The shapes of the *kontors* in the Hansa were standardized, which is why many of the historic buildings that were previously used in trading during the Hanseatic League’s existence have a similar appearance. This is also often the case for churches in the Hanseatic League area as they had the same architects, who shared common Hanseatic League architectural “standards of beauty”.

Riga has had strong connections with Northern German cities, especially Bremen, since the 13th century as this was the home of a significant number of Crusaders and was also the former residence of the founder of Riga, Bishop Albert. It is worth mentioning that the Crusaders and Bishop Albert were involved in the establishment of the first brick buildings in the City of Riga. This specific region’s architectural preferences were most common in the appearance of Riga’s first buildings.

The beginning of the city of Riga

Shortly after the founding of the city, Bishop Albert and the Crusaders, who mainly came from Northern German lands such as Saxony, Hamburg and Bremen, began the construction of the city in the way which was familiar to them. Therefore, as previously mentioned, the city’s oldest architecture is quite similar to that of Northern Germany.

The fortifications around the city were some of the first structures to appear in Riga. These were required for protection against the local tribes to prevent them from destroying or disrupting the functioning of the new missionary centre in the

Baltic lands. The wall around Riga was around 9 meters high and 1.3 meters wide, and entry into Riga was allowed only through the city gates that were protected by gate towers. The wall had many towers along its length for additional protection. Nowadays, parts of this wall can be seen at *Torna* Street 17, but the only remaining tower is the Sand Tower, known today as the Powder Tower, and currently housing the Latvian War Museum. Some parts of the city wall were well integrated into later buildings in Riga’s Old Town. A good example is the Swedish Gate, which was constructed in the 16th century, and which was successfully included in the 13th-century city wall.



From the left to the right: St. George’s Church and St. John’s Church.

In addition to the Riga defensive wall, other structures included the Bishop of Riga’s castle, the castle of the Livonian Brothers of the Sword (a Catholic military order established by Bishop Albert) and St. George’s Church (*Svētā Jura baznīca*) that was built in 1209. Unfortunately, of the buildings mentioned, only St. George’s Church is still present in Riga’s landscape today. The other buildings have disappeared or remained as building walls, as can currently be seen in John’s Yard (*Jāņa sēta*). The names of the structures’ architects are unknown, but the buildings do contain some aspects of the Romanesque medieval architectural style which was especially popular at that time in the German lands and to a lesser extent in other parts of Western Europe.

The main 13th-century building in Riga was the Riga Cathedral or, as it is better known, the Dome Cathedral. This magnificent church, which is one of the most recognizable buildings in Riga, is the largest church in the Baltic states and was the residence of the Archbishop of Riga for a few centuries. The cathedral has its architectural roots in a few Northern German cities. As Bishop Albert had been

assigned to Bremen's Cathedral before arriving in the Baltics, this building was one of the main inspirations for the Riga Cathedral's appearance. Other buildings that impacted significantly on Riga Cathedral's appearance were the Cathedral of Ratzeburg (which was the first brick church in Northern Germany and was built around the same time as Riga Cathedral) and the Cathedral of Lübeck. The cathedrals mentioned were constructed of red bricks – a material that was also chosen as the main material for the Riga Cathedral. All the mentioned cathedrals also share some similarities in terms of their size, form, decoration and their interiors.

Work on the Dome Cathedral started in 1211 and ended in the second part of the 13th century. Despite the fact that mainly Romanesque and Gothic medieval architectural styles were used during the building process, many other styles were added to the church over time due to the many restoration works undertaken on the cathedral.

Another significant building from the 13th century is St. Peter's Church – the highest church in Riga, which was mentioned for the first time in 1209. St. Peter's church is an excellent example of the Gothic style and acquired most of its beauty around the 14th century when it was fully rebuilt by a German architect from Rostock, Johann Rumeschottel. Rumeschottel used the shapes and forms typical of the Mecklenburg region in his work. In its appearance, St. Peter's Church is, therefore, similar to churches in Rostock and Bad Doberan, as well as Schwerin Cathedral in Germany. An interesting fact about St. Peter's Church is that its width is longer than its length – a parameter that is common mainly for the Mecklenburg region of Germany, but quite uncommon for other European countries. Another church, St. James's Cathedral in Riga, was built using a similar pattern. It was completed in 1225 and also shares the Gothic style, the same style as St. Peter's Church.

German architecture in Riga in the 14th-15th centuries

In the 14th century, German building master Dietrich Kreige was responsible for two significant buildings that became essential parts of today's cityscape. One was Riga Castle, which was built around 1340 and served as a seat for the head of the Livonian Order, and the New House, which was built around 1334 and hosted the local trade guild. Both buildings have undergone significant changes over time. Riga Castle was destroyed a century later during a conflict with the citizens of Riga and then rebuilt and has been reconstructed many times since

then, adding new architectural styles and sections to the original structures. The New House changed owners in the centuries that followed and was rebuilt multiple times in the 16th, 17th and 19th centuries, mostly by architects from the Netherlands, who gave the building a new look. Because of its new role and new owners (the Brotherhood of the Blackheads), the New House acquired the new name by which we know it today – the House of the Blackheads.



From the left to the right: House of Blackheads and "Three Brothers".

In the 14th century, German builders and architects were also involved in the creation of Riga's Convent yard, an area of the city that included several buildings and served as a shelter for the homeless and poor, as well as being a residential and storage area. In the same century, work began on the current Riga Merchant Guild or Large Guild of Riga. Despite the fact that the Guild was rebuilt in the 16th, 17th and 19th centuries, some original parts of the building still remain within the Large Guild. An example is the Münster room, which is a great example of Riga's Gothic architecture. Lastly, work with late Gothic and Renaissance elements was finished on St. John's Church around the 14th century.

The oldest residential building still present in the city is the "oldest brother" of the "Three Brothers" building complex. It is thought that the building at *Mazā Pils* Street 17, which combines a mix of late Gothic and Renaissance elements, was built at some time during the 15th century. However, the other "two brothers" in the complex are much younger than the first, and were built in the 17th and 18th centuries. Despite this, the "Three Brothers" complex can be considered to be an excellent example of common Hanseatic architecture, as complexes similar in form, style and idea also appeared in Tallinn, Copenhagen, Stockholm, and some Dutch and Northern German cities. Unfortunately, no older medieval residential buildings have remained. Others from the same century were destroyed during fires, wars and the implementation of new projects.

German architecture in Riga in the 16th-17th centuries

In the 16th and 17th centuries, most of the significant buildings that were built in Riga were associated with German merchants – as the city grew, trade boomed, and merchants became wealthier. They spent their wealth on the creation of bigger residential buildings and on creating additional space for commerce. Therefore, many residential buildings appeared in Riga at that time, which have remained as important architectural monuments until this very day. It is also important to note, that in the 16th and 17th centuries, the Baroque architectural style had a significant influence on buildings all across the city, and even on those that had previously been built in different styles (Romanesque and Gothic, which was the case for the main churches in Riga).

Significant buildings in the Baroque style were created by German architect Rupert Bindenschu. His two best known works are the Reuternhaus (*Reiterna nams*), built in 1688, and the House of Dannenstern (*Dannenšterna nams*), built in 1696. Both houses were built for two wealthy German merchants and mirror Baroque traditions that were common in other Hanseatic cities. Bindenschu was also actively involved in the reconstruction of older buildings – St. Peter's Church, St. John's Church and the Large Guild of Riga were rebuilt using Baroque elements.

Other important residential buildings that were built in that period by German traders are the House of Mentzendorff, which currently serves as a museum and the seat of the Latvian-Baltic German organization *Domus Rigensis*, the buildings at *Tirgoņu* Street 10, *Meistaru* Street 19, 21 and 23, and one of the “Three Brothers” complex buildings. Among the storage houses and warehouses, the most significant examples are the building complex on Vecpilsētas Street 8 and 10, as well as a few warehouses on *Alksnāja* Street. All of the mentioned projects had architectural similarities with buildings from Northern Germany.

The Great Devastators of Riga: fire, wars, Kārlis Ulmanis and socialism

After spending time in the Old Town each day, many international and domestic tourists who visit Riga may begin to assume that the centre of Riga looks sufficiently old, medieval and “German”, and this time will enable them to recognize some parallels with old towns in Northern Germany. This assumption could actually not be further from reality. Despite the more than 800-year history

of the city, the centre of Riga, the Old Town, is relatively new. Almost the only buildings that still stand in the city from the 13th and 14th centuries are the few main churches. But even they experienced radical changes – the shape and form of towers, the main architectural style applied in a church, and extensions to buildings. They were rebuilt and remade many times throughout history. Other structures from 13th century medieval Riga were mostly destroyed (except for a small section of the city wall) or rebuilt anew (Riga Castle, which is a replica of the original building with many additions. Therefore, it is difficult to classify its style, and to compare it to other castles in the Hansa region). Some more evidence of the absence of early medieval architecture in Riga is provided by the fact that the oldest residential building that still remains in the city was built in the 15th century – almost 200 years after the founding of Riga.

Why is this so and what is the reason for the absence of older architecture and wider German heritage? These are the main four factors:

1. Fire. Originally, Riga's buildings including its churches, were mostly made of wood. These were not safe, and in the 13th-century alone, there were countless fires that devastated the city. Eventually, this triggered the decision to ban the construction of wooden buildings in Riga at the end of the 13th century. Fire was also contributing to the devastation of the city in a more controlled way – during periods of war, the popular tactic of “burned land” was widely used in Riga. In order to deny the enemy (be it the Swedes, French or Russians) access to the benefits that Riga could provide, the city was burned numerous times on purpose by its owners. This happened in 1601, 1605, 1700, 1709 and 1812. The fire in 1812 was especially devastating, as it burned down over 700 buildings (but mostly around the Old Town). Ironically, Napoleon Bonaparte's army had no intention of attacking or occupying Riga in 1812, and the actions were, thus, largely pointless.

2. Wars. Many wars that heavily impacted the Old Town of Riga left a distinct mark on the city. Such wars as the Great Northern War, WWI and WWII eradicated a great deal of its historical architecture and monuments. Even such symbolic and crucial sites like the Town Hall and the city square of Riga were destroyed in WWII.

3. Kārlis Ulmanis. After the establishment of his authoritarian regime in Latvia, Ulmanis proclaimed that Riga was “too German” and that the buildings in Riga did not fit in with the “Latvian national spirit”. The decision was, therefore, made to clean up the Old Town of Riga from “foreign” architecture and replace it with monumental buildings that would make Riga fully fit in with the “Latvian national spirit”. Luckily, the idea was only partly implemented. In 1938, historic architecture in the area extending from the city hall to the riverside was

eliminated and a square and a large monumental governmental building were built in front of the Riga Dome. Many historic quarters of Riga with dozens of historical buildings were torn down. Larger plans for the wider eradication of “foreign” architecture were prevented by WWII.

4. Socialism. After the USSR seized power in Latvia at the end of WWII, the view that the Old Town of Riga was “too German” remained, which differed little from Kārlis Ulmanis’ view. It was widely believed that true socialism could not be built on the remains of Hanseatic architecture. Historical architecture, therefore, became unwelcome in Riga once again. This was the reason why the decision was made to demolish the remains of the Town Hall, the House of the Blackheads and other buildings around the city square. The monumental museum of the Red Latvian Riflemen and the new Riga Technical University building were constructed in their place. Similar actions were taken in other parts of the Old Town, but on a smaller scale compared to the plans that Ulmanis had in mind.

German architectural heritage in independent Latvia

When Latvia regained its independence, the tragedy of the loss of cultural heritage and the pain from the loss of a huge proportion of its historic architecture was widely admitted. In the 20th century, authoritarian and totalitarian governments replaced many small and attractive buildings with massive and monumental ones, leaving an impact on the skyline of Riga. The decision was, therefore, made that certain steps had to be taken to reclaim the previous beauty of the city.

Shortly after independence, work began that was focussed on restoring many buildings across the Old Town. In 1999, the House of the Blackheads was finally built again, and Riga’s Town Hall – in 2001. Similar projects were implemented in other parts of the city. However, more had to be done. Some historical buildings required good care and restoration. Two excellent examples of Baroque architecture built by German architect Rupert Bindenschu in the 17th century remained in a poor state. Reiterns House needs at least some external cosmetic renovation and more comprehensive restoration inside, but the House of Dannenstern needs full-scale renovation as it is currently slowly collapsing. There are many similar examples.

Interestingly, things have developed in a similar way in Germany. Shortly after WWII, the restoration of destroyed old towns and historic monuments



House of Reiterns (left) and Dannenstern (right) – excellent examples of Baroque architecture by German Rupert Bindenschu in 17th century, in their current poor state.

became taboo in Germany. As historical “national”, “folkloric” architecture had previously been politicized by the Nazis, post-war German towns decided to leave most of their historic architecture which had been harmed during the war (around 80% of the historical architecture in the main German cities was destroyed by the carpet-bombing of the Allied forces) in ruins, giving preference to more modern architecture styles, concrete and hard edges. However, new generation of Germans have a more positive view of German architectural heritage. In recent decades and especially in the 21st century, German cities have experienced a wave of restoration. Cities like Frankfurt and Lübeck, with the strong support of local city councils, are actively reconstructing whole districts of their Old Towns, and in places like Dresden, Berlin and Potsdam, such historic treasures as Frauenkirche (fully reconstructed in 2005), the City Palace of Berlin (fully reconstructed in 2020) and the City Palace of Potsdam (fully reconstructed in 2013) have been restored.

Latvia and Germany face similar challenges at this point – should old towns be freed from the invasive architecture of the post-war period? Should the reconstruction of historical buildings that had been destroyed take place? Should city councils be actively involved in promoting the reconstruction of old towns and be financing such activities? These are questions that are yet to be answered in both Latvia and Germany. However, it should be clear that historical architecture needs protection, restoration and preservation to the maximum degree, as it is an essential part of our common histories and also happens to be highly appealing to both the local population and to tourists.

Conclusion

Riga and German cities have shared cultural links since the beginning of the 13th century, when Bishop Albert established the city. Riga was therefore created under the heavy influence of Northern Germany, which can be seen in Riga's skyline, which is filled with churches similar to those in Bremen, Lubeck, Ratzeburg and the cities of Macklenburg region, while residential buildings and storehouses from the 15th to the 17th centuries have been influenced by German traders and architects. Common Hanseatic architectural traits with those of Northern German cities can also be seen. Despite these connections, however, a large proportion of historical heritage was lost due to wars, fires, the actions of certain individuals and ideological reasons. And even though a lot has been done since Latvia regained its independence, with buildings being restored and some built anew, there is still room for more action. Not all of the historical buildings are in good shape and a way needs to be found to resolve this.

The mood should remain optimistic though. Much historical architecture has been recently renovated and there is a clear interest in the German architectural heritage in Latvia. Recent cooperation projects between the Latvian German Union and others, resulting in a great book about German architects in Latvia, serves as a good example. Another fine example involves the 18th century Wagner's House and Wagner's Hall in Riga, which previously served as the City Theatre, and is a place where world-famous German composer and conductor Richard Wagner worked for some years. Even though the building was in poor condition a few years ago and had quite a pessimistic future (the government had no resources for its restoration, but attempts to sell the building had not been successful), things turned out differently, as Latvia and Germany mutually decided to restore the historic building. In 2020, it was officially given to the Richard Wagner Gesellschaft, which took on the obligation to restore the building. In the same year, the German parliament, the Bundestag, decided to allocate 5.2 million EUR for the restoration of the building. 10,000 EUR were provided by the Richard Wagner Association Frankfurt. It is also important to note that the official patrons of the project are the President of Latvia (*Egils Levits*) and the President of Germany (*Frank-Walter Steinmeier*). If the restoration work goes as planned, this German-Latvian cooperation will result in the full restoration of Wagner's House, which could already open its doors to the public in 2025.

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Video Surveillance-based Data Processing: a Perspective for Future Bilateral Cooperation

In celebrating the three-year anniversary of the General Data Protection Regulation¹ (hereinafter – the GDPR) that came into effect on May 25, 2018, one should look back and assess this data protection tool for both its relevance and application. As suggested by the GDPR's official website, the regulation is considered to be “the toughest privacy and security law in the world”², and for good reason. The GDPR provides member states, companies, private individuals, and organizations with a certain threshold which must be met that relates to e.g., the acquisition of consent, the upholding of the principle of data minimization, the observation of data protection by design and other elements, as stated within the GDPR.

In the light of rapidly developing European private law, data protection can be characterized as one of the by-products that has arisen from such development. As work with data and data processing is associated with most parts of the legal system, such as criminal, administrative, civil and other areas, it is necessary to observe and uphold principles that would create a legally harmonious environment, while at the same time observing principles of data protection.

¹ Regulation (EU) 2016/679 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 27 April 2016 on the protection of natural persons with regard to the processing of personal data and on the free movement of such data, and repealing Directive 95/46/EC

² European Commission, “What is GDPR, the EU's new data protection law?”, available on: <https://gdpr.eu/what-is-gdpr/>. Accessed June 21, 2021.

Within this understanding, data protection may be applicable to a large part of the everyday life of every person within the EU, since whenever an activity with data is performed, the GDPR may be of relevance.

Explainer: What is personal data and data processing?

The GDPR states that *personal data*:

means any information relating to an identified or identifiable natural person ('data subject'); an identifiable natural person is one who can be identified, directly or indirectly, in particular by reference to an identifier such as a name, an identification number, location data, an online identifier or to one or more factors specific to the physical, physiological, genetic, mental, economic, cultural or social identity of that natural person;

Moreover, *data processing* is explained as:

any operation or set of operations which is performed on personal data or on sets of personal data, whether or not by automated means, such as collection, recording, organisation, structuring, storage, adaptation or alteration, retrieval, consultation, use, disclosure by transmission, dissemination or otherwise making available, alignment or combination, restriction, erasure or destruction;

While the GDPR does provide legal grounds for data processing to take place, it is necessary to remark that, in the event of infringement, persons responsible for such unlawful data processing may be subjected to serious fines ranging from thousands to millions of euros. As of May 25 2018, approximately 700 fines have been imposed, amounting to € 293,830,537 in total, with the largest fine being against Google Inc., in France on January 21 2019: a € 50,000,000 fine.³ Moreover, the second largest fine was levelled against H&M Hennes & Mauritz Online Shop in Germany (€ 32,258,708 in fines)⁴, which concerned the monitoring of several hundred employees at an H&M Service Centre in Nuremberg. In this specific case, the H&M Service Centre in Nuremberg performed wide-scale video and audio surveillance of its employees by collecting data about their wellbeing, medical, family conditions and their personal experiences, as well as their religious beliefs, whilst making this data accessible for up to 50 other managers of the company. The collected data was used to create individual and detailed profiles of employees,

³ Privacy Affairs, "GDPR Fine Tracker & Statistics", available on: <https://www.privacyaffairs.com/gdpr-fines/>. Accessed June 22, 2021.

⁴ Ibid.

which was a combination of data on their work performance, as well as their private lives. As a result, the Hamburg Commissioner for Data Protection and Freedom of Information issued a fine of € 32,258,708 for the unlawful data processing which was performed by the H&M Service Centre in Nuremberg.⁵ While the company acknowledged the manner in which it had collected data about its employees, the overall stance of the management towards the affected persons improved after the decision. Eventually, the H&M company's management apologized to its employees and also paid out considerable compensations to those who had been most affected by the unlawful data processing.

More infringements and more fines during the COVID-19 pandemic

In reviewing data protection in more recent times, it should be noted that the number and the size of fines issued within the European Union (hereinafter – the EU) only continued to increase during the COVID-19 pandemic. Alongside the pandemic-induced boom in e-commerce and online purchases, many EU member states have taken a proactive role when issuing fines against companies, individuals, and organizations (see Figure 1 and 2)⁶ regardless of the epidemic situation within the EU. Hence, all eCommerce stores, repair shops, retailers or any other entities operating within the EU are, and will be, more responsible for the manner in which they perform data processing since "data are becoming the new raw material of

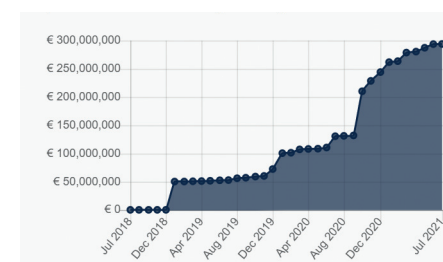


Figure 1 Course of the sums of fines issued by EU member states (cumulative)

⁵ European Data Protection Board, Hamburg Commissioner Fines H&M 35.3 Million Euro for Data Protection Violations in Service Centre, available on: https://edpb.europa.eu/news/national-news/2020/hamburg-commissioner-fines-hm-353-million-euro-data-protection-violations_en. Accessed July 14, 2021.

⁶ CMS.Law, GDPR Enforcement Tracker, available on: <https://www.enforcementtracker.com/?insights>. Accessed July 15, 2021.

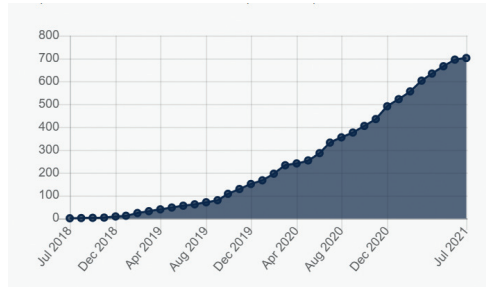


Figure 2 Course of the sums of fines issued by EU member states (cumulative)

business” (Craig Mundie, Senior Advisor to the CEO at Microsoft) and thus, as with any other emerging possibility, comes the means of regulating such.

The area of data protection is of particular relevance when issuing judgments that are of a punitive nature. Depending on the circumstances of each individual case, the body responsible for passing judgments and interpreting the law is the judiciary, which ultimately decides whether an individual, company or an organization has complied with the laws and principles prescribed within the GDPR or not. In this regard, it is essential to outline the role of Germany in the development of the GDPR and the role of its interpretation within national courts and supranational European bodies. While strategies and the interpretation of the GDPR may be examined from a supervisory perspective, Germany has taken a proactive role in establishing a constructive basis for further developing data protection on both a national as well as a supranational level. German courts have been issuing judgments that invalidate provisions in national laws that depart from the GDPR, therefore displaying particular interest in the individual rights and freedom of the German public.⁷ Starting from fining companies for illegal marketing calls,⁸ to protecting employees from the unlawful use of video surveillance cameras in the workplace;⁹ these are some of the areas that are under a certain threshold of requirements for improving the overall quality of data processing within the specific field.

⁷ European Commission, “Data protection as a pillar of citizens’ empowerment and the EU’s approach to the digital transition – two years of application of the General Data Protection Regulation” available on: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52020DC0264>. Accessed June 27, 2021.

⁸ Schindler IT Solutions GmbH, Fine for Vodafone Germany for illegal marketing calls, available on: <https://easygdpr.eu/en/gdpr-incident/fine-for-vodafone-germany-for-illegal-marketing-calls/>. Accessed July 14, 2021.

⁹ Neil Hodge, German laptop retailer fined \$12.7M under GDPR for employee surveillance, available on: <https://www.complianceweek.com/regulatory-enforcement/german-laptop-retailer-fined-127m-under-gdpr-for-employee-surveillance/29911.article>. Accessed July 13, 2021.

Moreover, Germany has been ranked 3rd within the EU for the amount fined (see Figure 3), yet it ranks 6th in the number of fines rendered (see Figure 4). Within this understanding, data protection authorities in Germany provide an efficiency-based approach to GDPR compliance, according to which only the most vital cases are being given the most serious fines. This approach seems to also be a guideline for other EU countries – among them Latvia.

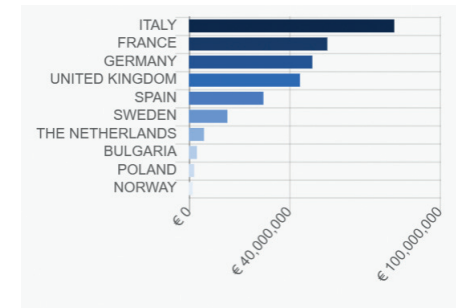


Figure 3 Countries with the highest fines by total sum of fines

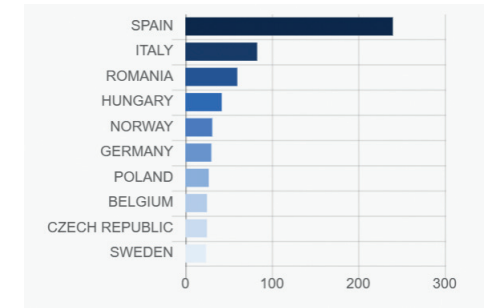


Figure 4 Countries with the highest fines by number of fines

GDPR cooperation between Germany and Latvia

The German and Latvian governments have taken steps towards creating fruitful cooperation in the area of data protection. This cooperation is displayed in the various exchanges of knowledge and experience between both states. By using the exchange project with the German State Commissioner for Data Protection and Freedom of Information Rhineland-Palatinate (Der Landesbeauftragte für den Datenschutz und die Informationsfreiheit Rheinland-Pfalz) and the State Data Inspectorate of the Republic of Latvia as an example, it can be shown that the questions of data protection and freedom of information have always been a point of interest for both member states. Within the abovementioned project, both the German and the Latvian counterparts visited each other to examine the structure, available resources, strategic goals as well as main principles of the respective institutions in order to better understand the daily duties of both the German State Commissioner for Data Protection and Freedom of Information Rhineland-Palatinate and the State Data Inspectorate of the Republic of Latvia.

Since the GDPR regulates a large proportion of data processing, one of the main aspects for organizing the project was to discuss how both of the institutions tackle the organization of the complaints procedure, the application of fines, as well as the resolution of international disputes.¹⁰ In this way, they were taking steps towards more efficient development of procedures for institutions that are tackling issues that relate to the GDPR. Moreover, this cooperation has also been displayed in the context of developing projects in other countries. For example, the “Capacity Building of the National Centre for Personal Data Protection of the Republic of Moldova”¹¹ international project revolves around the provision of experience and knowledge between Moldova, Latvia, and Germany with the goal of developing and reforming data protection regulations in Moldova. At the same time, the project is engaging in cooperation with the German Foundation on International Legal Cooperation as well as the Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Latvia.



Figure 5 Closed-circuit camera used as a tool for data processing. Source: Scott Webb/Pexels

Without the support and proactivity displayed by both the German and Latvian counterparts respectively, data protection would not have developed to the extent that it has to this date. While it is understandable that the GDPR has been in force for only three years, its application has not been any less significant than it had been in the initial year of it coming into effect.

Bearing the role of Germany in mind in the development of data protection, its influence might not be as direct as initially perceived. With German Data

Protection Authorities making decisions that determine whether an individual, company or an organization breaches the GDPR, Germany creates an indirect link to the possible application of such decisions in different states. Hence, it must be

¹⁰ Datu valsts inspekcija (State Data Inspectorate of the Republic of Latvia), Datu valsts inspekcija stiprina sadarbību ar Vācijas Reinzemes-Pfalcas iestādi Datu aizsardzības un informācijas brīvības jautājumos, available (in Latvian) on: <https://www.dvi.gov.lv/lv/datu-valsts-inspekci-ja-stiprina-sadarbibu-ar-vacijas-reinzemes-pfalcas-iestadi-datu-aizsardzibas-un-informacijas-brivibas-jautajumos>. Accessed June 26, 2021.

¹¹ Latvijas Republikas Tieslietu ministrija (Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Latvia), “Latvija sadarbībā ar Vāciju uzsāk Twinning projektu datu aizsardzības jautājumos Moldovā”, available (in Latvian) on: <https://www.tm.gov.lv/lv/latvija-sadarbiba-ar-vaciju-uzsak-twinning-projektu-datu-aizsardzibas-jautajumos-moldova>. Accessed June 27, 2021.

noted that while individual lawmakers of member states develop a certain area of law, they are prone to evaluating the possible application of the regulation by different member states and implementing it domestically. In this matter, the EU provides the basis for shared competence. This essentially means that the Treaty on the European Union (henceforth – TEU) assigns to individual member states the competence to regulate fields which are not regulated by the EU, or at least to the extent that they provide unambiguous regulation.¹² For example, if a member state wishes to regulate an area that had not already been regulated by the GDPR, the member state may do so, according to the *Bodil Lindqvist* case:

[...] the national laws applicable in this area must not result in any lessening of the protection they afford but must, on the contrary, seek to ensure a high level of protection in the Community.¹³

Therefore, member states may provide a higher level of protection when it comes to tackling certain areas regulated by the EU, including, but not limited to, data protection. In this context, shared competence may be more beneficial when taken all together with the experience and knowledge that has already been achieved by different member states, rather than by an individual approach.

Big Brother is watching: Impact of the GDPR on video surveillance

Bearing in mind the rapid development of modern video surveillance technologies, both in their technical and digital capabilities, the author of this work explores the field of video surveillance in establishing a common approach for the

¹² Article 5(2) of the Treaty on the European Union reads: The limits of Union competences are governed by the principle of conferral [...] Under the principle of conferral, the Union shall act only within the limits of the competences conferred upon it by the member states in the Treaties to attain the objectives set out therein. Competences not conferred upon the Union in the Treaties remain with the member states

¹³ CJEU case C-101/01, Criminal proceedings against Bodil Lindqvist, para. 95; CJEU case C524/06. A Swedish case that concerned a Swedish woman (Lindqvist) who had posted information about her volunteer work at a local Swedish church on her website. This information included information about her colleagues such as names, surnames, and phone numbers. As Lindqvist did not obtain permission from the persons concerned nor did she inform them of such posting, the Swedish data protection authorities commenced proceedings against Ms Lindqvist which ultimately led to her paying a fine for having processed personal data by automatic means and transferring data with no prior permission from the persons concerned.

EU, since around one billion surveillance cameras are predicted to be installed all around the globe by the year 2021.¹⁴ For example, over 200 million surveillance cameras were in use in China in 2018. However, this number is expected to grow to 500 million by the year 2021.¹⁵ What was once deemed as fiction is now a reality, as facial recognition towers are used on a day-to-day basis and are capable of identifying and locating any persons within the viewing field of the camera. However, it should be emphasized that the use of surveillance cameras and facial recognition technologies are not just applicable to Asia, which contributes to half of the used surveillance cameras worldwide, but also to other parts of the world including the United States and the EU.¹⁶

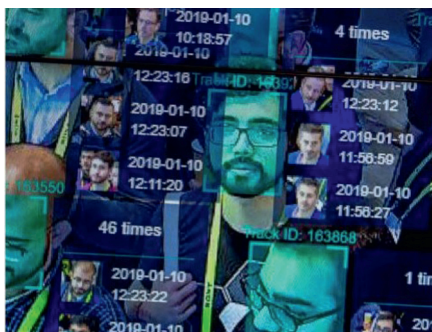


Figure 6 Real-time facial recognition that uses live tracking. Source: David McNew/AFP/Getty

The most common surveillance cameras being used are closed-circuit television cameras (hereinafter – CCTV). These cameras are used more often for the detection and prevention of criminal activities. However, the purpose may be different in each individual case. City monitoring, behavioural research and the collection of intelligence could all be described as uses for CCTVs.¹⁷ For the purposes mentioned, surveillance cameras are equipped with different filters and technologies to influence their

overall data processing performance and usually include a variation of gravity, motion, lighting, and other detection sensors.

Considering the aforementioned, in conjunction with the area of video surveillance, it is essential to set a framework on the general application of the GDPR in both member states. That is, Article 6 of the GDPR establishes the legal grounds for individuals, companies, and organizations to perform such data processing. As mentioned in the GDPR, there are six legal grounds which

¹⁴ CNBC, “One billion surveillance cameras will be watching around the world in 2021, a new study says”, available on: <https://www.cnbc.com/2019/12/06/one-billion-surveillance-cameras-will-be-watching-globally-in-2021.html>. Accessed June 29, 2021.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Rohan Massey “Processing of video surveillance data: the focus on legitimate interest” *Computer and Telecommunications Law Review* (2019), available on: Westlaw international. Accessed June 21, 2021.

are used for different purposes and under different circumstances. However, Article 6(1)(f) is generally believed to be the main provision used for setting the groundwork for such video surveillance-based data processing. The legitimate interest mentioned under Article 6(1)(f) may be characterized by the simple question of “why?”, which creates a requirement for data controllers (persons performing data processing) to provide sufficient reasoning for the processing taking place. For this purpose, data controllers ought to perform a balancing test that determines whether the data processing at hand is lawful, or for that matter, unlawful. For example, a restaurant owner decides to place surveillance cameras in the restrooms to control the overall tidiness in the restrooms. Here the rights of data subjects clearly override the legitimate interest of the controller, hence video surveillance cameras should not be installed in such locations.¹⁸ This idea had been further established in the case of *František Ryneš* which concerned the element of property boundaries when performing video surveillance.¹⁹ In the relevant case, Mr. Ryneš had installed surveillance cameras that recorded his property and a part of the sidewalk near the property. Since Mr. Ryneš had previously been subject to attacks on him and his family, static CCTV cameras were installed for the purposes of family and property protection. Due to the instalment of these cameras, Mr. Ryneš was able to record and identify the persons who had previously attacked his household (windows were broken) and as a result, turned to the police and provided the acquired data. Once the persons responsible were found, one of them had requested an explanation about whether the recording had been *ab initio* lawful. Consequently, the Supreme Administrative Court of the Czech Republic made a request to the European Court of Justice for a preliminary ruling concerning the interpretation of Article 3(2) of Directive 95/46/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 October 1995 (the predecessor of the GDPR) on the protection of individuals with regard to the processing of personal data and on the free movement of such data.²⁰ The court ruled that recording should “end at the property boundaries”.²¹

Moreover, the court judgment of 27 March 2019, 6 C 2.18 of the Federal Administrative Court of the Federal Republic of Germany concerned a German dental practice that had installed a surveillance camera near the reception desk of

¹⁸ European Data Protection Board, Guidelines 3/2019 on processing of personal data through video devices, version 2.0., available on: https://edpb.europa.eu/sites/edpb/files/files/file1/edpb_guidelines_201903_video_devices_en_0.pdf. Accessed April 2, 2021

¹⁹ Judgment in case C-212/13 *František Ryneš v Úřad pro ochranu osobních údajů*

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ *supra* note 18.

the dental practice for the purposes of observing whether any patient was located in the reception area when no receptionists or other personnel were be close by.²² Since the cameras were used for monitoring the whole premises of the reception without storing the data, the State Commissioner for Data Protection and for the Right of Access to Files Brandenburg (Brandenburg DPA), upon inspection, had filed an order which requested the dental practice to place the cameras in a manner that they would only record the reception desk instead of the premises in their entirety. Accordingly, the dentist had appealed by filing a lawsuit against the institution that had given the order to move the cameras at the dental practice. The court, however, rejected this objection. While the dentist filed an appeal, the court stated that even in situations when the processed data was not stored, it may still be characterized as data processing under the GDPR. Moreover, the court held that the lack of sufficient reasoning and factual basis for determining whether the legitimate interest had outweighed the interests, rights and freedoms of data subjects, were of essential value when the court ultimately ruled against the dentist who had filmed the premises of the reception area in their entirety instead of the reception table alone, thus leaving the order made by the Brandenburg DPA in force.²³

Why and for what reason? Data processing must be proportional

While the example mentioned above does display the substantial requirement for the necessity of a balancing of interests, a more common example could be the protection of property against burglary, theft, or vandalism. Even though the need for such video surveillance is understandable, it must be emphasized that the reasoning behind performing such data processing must be based on real and existing issues rather than just speculative or fictional situations.²⁴ As suggested by the European Data Protection Board – data processing must be proportional in order to avoid infringing upon the interests, rights and freedoms of other individuals.²⁵

²² Judgment of the Federal Administrative Court of March 27, 2019 - BVerwG 6 C 2.18, available at: <https://www.bverwg.de/270319U6C2.18.0>. Accessed June 21, 2021.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ supra note 18.

²⁵ Ibid.

This reasoning goes hand in hand with the general evaluation of interests when considering both the interests and fundamental rights of data subjects and the interests of data controllers. Hence, when a data controller is performing video surveillance-based data processing, he or she must establish a balancing test under which relevant aspects are determined to create the reasoning for the perceived question of “why?”.

For example, the element of necessity for proportional data processing is examined in the judgment of a 15 May 2018 case by the Federal Court of Justice of Germany. The case concerned a traffic accident that had resulted in minor damages and no personal injuries.²⁶ In the initial court proceedings, the court concluded that both drivers had been responsible for the traffic accident and, therefore, both were liable for 50% of the damages caused. Since neither of the drivers could provide any eyewitnesses or experts, it was difficult to determine whether the defendant could have been fully liable, however, the plaintiff (the person filing the lawsuit) had submitted a video recording from his dashboard-mounted camera of the events that took place. This recording was submitted to the court of appeals in which the court concluded that the evidence submitted by the plaintiff contained a large portion of personal information (number plates, pedestrian identities and other non-event-based data). Hence, the court held that there had been a violation of the German data protection law and, therefore, further emphasized “the violation of a prohibition of use of evidence on the basis of the balance of interests needs to be consequent”.²⁷ This notion was further explored in the third and final instance, in which the court ruled that while the plaintiff had breached the data protection law of Germany, this ultimately could not serve as the sole reason for the total dismissal of the evidence presented.²⁸

Then there is the case of *Valsts policijas Rīgas reģiona pārvaldes Kārtības policijas pārvalde “Rīgas pašvaldības SIA “Rīgas Satiksme”*,²⁹ which concerned a dispute between the Latvian national police and a state-owned public transportation company regarding the acquisition of data about persons concerned.

²⁶ Judgment of the Federal Court of Justice of 15 May 2018 - VI ZR 233/17, available on: <https://juris.bundesgerichtshof.de/cgi-bin/rechtsprechung/document.py?Gericht=bgh&Art=en&nr=85141&pos=0&anz=1>. Accessed June 26, 2021.

²⁷ Christina Etteldorf, “About Dashcams und Digital Estate - German Federal Court of Justice Weighs up Data Protection Interests,” *European Data Protection Law Review (EDPL)* 4, no. 3 (2018), pp. 370-374.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Judgment in Case C-13/16, Rīgas satiksme, May 4, 2017.

SIA “Rigas Satiksme” (henceforth – RS) had filed a request for the disclosure of information from the national police (name, surname and identification number) about a minor who had caused damage to a RS operated trolleybus to initiate civil proceedings for claiming damages. National police had denied this request by a decision explaining that the police did not have permission under



Figure 7 One of the trolleybuses used by SIA “Rigas satiksme” for daily commuting. Source: Dmitrijs Suļžics/ F64 Photo Agency

national law to provide all requested information to third parties. Consequently, RS challenged this decision in the administrative court. The case was put on hold, and the Latvian Supreme Court referred two preliminary questions to the ECJ regarding the interpretation of Article 7(f) of the Data Protection Directive (the predecessor of the GDPR).

As a result, the ECJ examined the case at hand and answered the questions presented by the Latvian

Supreme Court about the legitimate interests of a third party when requesting the disclosure of data. Firstly, the court addressed the question about the requirement to pursue a legitimate interest when requesting such data processing. The ECJ held that bringing an action to attain redress for damaged property may qualify as such. Secondly, the ECJ examined whether data processing is even necessary to pursue a legitimate interest. The ECJ stated that this condition is met under the current circumstances. If there was no data available, then it would be impossible to identify the person against whom the action was brought. And thirdly, the ECJ addressed the question of the requirement for the existence of a balancing of interests when a legitimate interest is at hand. The ECJ stated that such determination should be preserved on a case-to-case basis. Therefore, it is up to individual courts to evaluate whether the interests of a third party, or in this situation, the interests of RS, outweigh the interests of the national police when refusing to disclose the information at hand.³⁰

³⁰ Van Bael & Bells, “Legitimate Interests Concept Contained in Data Protection Directive Does Not Encompass an Obligation”, available on: <https://www.vbb.com/insights/corporate-commercial/corporate-commercial/legitimate-interests-concept-contained-in-data-protection-directive-does-not-encompass-an-obligation-for-data-processing>. Accessed June 29, 2021.

Legitimate interest as part of future cooperation

All of the above-mentioned cases bring special attention to the evaluation of legitimate interest when performing video surveillance-based data processing. This element is especially prevalent if individuals, companies, or organizations process excessive amounts of data. In such cases, the GDPR, as well as the interpretations of national courts, prevent persons from doing such unlawful data processing. However, the introduction of unmanned aerial vehicles, long range recording dashcams, as well as video surveillance cameras capable of facial recognition may bring new and more complicated challenges than the ones presented so far. By having close cooperation between member states on both multilateral and bilateral terms, an efficient approach may be presented as beneficial for both sides.

The overall idea of regulating the use of video surveillance cameras may have its own advantages and disadvantages, yet this is under a certain threshold of expectation which arises out of the rapid development of technology. And, by having modern and up-to-date solutions, we may preserve the already existing fundamental rights and freedoms of the public while at the same time maintaining favourable groundwork for individuals, companies and organizations to flourish in the midst of technological breakthroughs. While the EU does delegate some of its competences to its member states when forming an approach towards areas of great importance, it is crucial to cherish accomplishments and learn from mistakes because only through lasting cooperation can we as individuals and members of the European Union thrive in this time of change and prosperity. Within this understanding, the author of this work believes that bilateral cooperation could be continued in the form of the exchange of knowledge via different projects, as well as conferences. Since data protection no longer only concerns security-based aspects, but rather social and economic aspects, a more detail-driven approach could be seen as beneficial for both of the sides involved, especially in the fields of banking and software development as well as other emerging fields that are shaping the present for a brighter tomorrow.



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believes in solidarity, equity, and democracy. He has discovered meaningful ways to fight the stigma against marginalized people and influence societal perceptions on privilege and justice by establishing the *Safe Space* non-profit organization. After graduating with distinction from his master's programme in July 2021, he is ready to reach new heights in fighting for what is equitable and just.

Jurģis Kalniņš

Biases Against Socially Marginalized Groups: Case Studies of Latvia and Germany

Eurobarometer data shows that the societal perceptions of discrimination against those with disabilities, women, and sexual minorities are fairly similar between Latvians and Germans. But is that really the case? This essay analyses how different components of bias-based discrimination against persons with disabilities, women, as well as lesbians, gays, and bisexuals, prevail when comparing Latvia and Germany. The conclusion is that legal protection as well as societal attitudes are more inclusive of people of marginalized backgrounds in Germany than in Latvia in all aspects.

Key words: Latvia, Germany, biases, socially marginalized groups, people with disabilities, sexual minorities, women

1. Being marginalized

When someone feels that they are not respected either legally or socially as an individual due to something they cannot change about themselves, they are being marginalized.¹ There are marginalized communities throughout the world. Ethnic and religious minorities, disabled people, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) people, and women are among the key groups identified as being marginalized. There are numerous reasons for marginalization.

¹ Bryan, J. (2018). *How to Combat Marginalizing Behaviors in the Workplace*. Retrieved from <https://www.gartner.com/smarterwithgartner/how-to-combat-marginalizing-behaviors-in-the-workplace/>

A lack of social mobility, an inability to communicate across cultural lines, inter-group misunderstanding, economic isolation, and a perception that every situation is “zero-sum” all lead to the marginalization of one group in order to allow the prosperity of another. Racism, sexism, ableism are a few of the “-isms” that can lead to marginalization.²

2. Research question

In this essay, the author will pay attention to two different aspects of discrimination against (1) persons with disabilities, (2) women, as well as (3) lesbians, gays, and bisexuals in both Latvia and Germany. The two aspects include (a) the overall protection (e.g., legal, economic, and political prospects) of the said groups, and (b) the societal attitudes against them. Therefore, the research question is as follows: “Overall, which country’s society tends to be more inclusive towards socially marginalized groups both legally and socially?”

Data from reports generated by EU-wide organizations such as ILGA-Europe, the Academic Network of European Disability Experts (ANED), the European Institute for Gender Equality, as well as other relevant organizations will be analysed to find an answer to the research question. A more detailed description of the research methodology is available in the section “Analysis”

3. Biases

The Oxford English dictionary defines bias as an “inclination or prejudice for or against one person or group, especially in a way considered to be unfair”.³ Biases come in two general forms – bias-based legislation (also known as legal discrimination or lack of legal protection for socially vulnerable groups of people) and societal discrimination (prejudice, bias, negative perceptions towards the marginalized). Both components are linked, but not necessarily, meaning that one can fuel the other. However, there are many instances where legal protections are in place whereas societal attitudes are lacking and vice-versa.⁴

² Yang, L. (2019). *Marginalization: What It Means and Why It Matters*. Retrieved from <https://fairygodboss.com/career-topics/marginalization>

³ Oxford Lexico. (2021). *Bias*. Retrieved from <https://www.lexico.com/definition/bias>

⁴ Dhanani, L. (2015). Measuring and Defining Discrimination. *Oxford Handbooks Online*. doi:10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199363643.013.22

This phenomenon stems from the discussion on whether one should pay more attention to fighting discriminatory laws within the legal system (a top → bottom approach) or discriminatory attitudes within society (a bottom → top approach) when trying to effectively promote social justice.⁵ Which method can be regarded as more productive is still up for debate. Furthermore, a lot obviously depends on the country’s political regime and other factors, such as society’s trust in governing bodies, the strength of civic society etc. However, an analysis of both of these elements is necessary for understanding the overall scope of biases towards socially marginalized groups.

4. Analysis

The choice of the categories studied (disability, sexual orientation or gender) is not coincidental. According to the 2019 Special Eurobarometer Survey No. 493 “Discrimination in the European Union”, there are fundamental differences between Latvia and Germany in the perception of discrimination against vulnerable groups in these three categories (i.e., those with disabilities, women or sexual minorities).⁶

	Latvia	Germany	Difference
<i>Skin colour</i>	22	57	35
<i>Religion or beliefs</i>	12	43	31
<i>Ethnic origin</i>	25	55	30
<i>Being perceived as too old or too young</i>	40	20	20
<i>Being Roma</i>	35	52	17
<i>Being transgender</i>	20	31	11
<i>Being intersex</i>	17	25	8
<i>Disability</i>	36	29	7
<i>Sexual orientation (being gay, lesbian or bisexual)</i>	30	36	6
<i>Being a man or a woman</i>	20	23	3

Figure 1. Share of respondents (%) in Latvia and Germany who indicate that discrimination on the basis of different identities is widespread in their country⁷

⁵ Equality and Human Rights Commission. (2017). *When prejudice turns into discrimination and unlawful behaviour*. Retrieved from <https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/our-work/blogs/when-prejudice-turns-discrimination-and-unlawful-behaviour>

⁶ Eurobarometer. (2020). *Special Eurobarometer Survey No. 493 “Discrimination in the European Union”*. Retrieved from <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/2251>

⁷ Ibid.

The table above shows the proportion of respondents in both countries who indicated that discrimination on the basis of different identities (column on the left) was widespread (total proportional % of ‘very common’ and ‘fairly common’ answers).

Interestingly, there are significant differences on average between Latvians and Germans on how they perceive discrimination against most people of vulnerable backgrounds. The starkest disparities (column “Difference”) are prevalent in categories such as “Skin colour”, “Religion or beliefs”, and “Ethnic origin” – where the discrepancy between Latvian and German respondents is above 30%. Furthermore, in all three of these cases, the respondents from Germany perceived discrimination as much more widespread than those in Latvia. This can be explained by perception phenomena, meaning that with more attention being paid to certain social groups, the level of societal understanding also increases on the issues they face.⁸ For instance, in many Eastern European countries, including Latvia, the main focus point when discussing gay and lesbian rights, currently revolves around family rights, whereas in more socially-forward-looking countries (e.g., Germany and the Nordics) the debates have progressed to more nuanced issues, such as hate speech, the fluidity of sexuality, etc.

Moreover, the only two categories where respondents from Latvia see discrimination as more widespread is against people with disabilities and in cases where a person is perceived as too old or too young.

The essay will focus on those categories where the Latvian/German perception of discrimination is most similar (closest to zero) in order to analyse whether this is actually the case. In this case, it is (1) discrimination based on a person’s disability status, (2) discrimination based on a person’s sexual orientation, and (3) discrimination based on gender stereotypes.

In the “Conclusions” section of this paper, there is a tabular overview of both components cross-referenced by country, as well as each of the studied marginalized groups. A “1” mark in a particular cell indicates that the situation with respect to either bias-based legislation or societal discrimination can be objectively deemed as more inclusive when comparing both studied countries. A cell that is left empty means that the opposite occurs, meaning that this is purely binary-comparative research.

⁸ The New York Times. (2020). *Why Talking About Our Problems Helps So Much (and How to Do It)*. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/03/smarter-living/talking-out-problems.html>

4.1. People with disabilities

To understand the legal situation of people with disabilities, it is necessary to analyse three aspects – their employment, education, and the risk of poverty. In **Latvia**, the employment rate of people with disabilities is higher than the EU average. Moreover, with the support of the European Structural Funds, a number of targeted measures were launched to promote the inclusion of people with disabilities in the labour market (subsidized jobs, consultations for employers, etc.) at the end of 2018. Despite these positive trends, people with severe disabilities (especially those over the age of 50) are in a much more unenviable position. In the field of education, it is important to mention that the proportion of people with disabilities who drop out of higher education institutions in Latvia is higher than the EU average. Furthermore, Latvia has one of the largest disparities in the share of people who have obtained a university degree, between those with or without disabilities. It should also be noted that the poverty situation of people with disabilities has not changed significantly over the last decade, due to a fragile social protection system and, in particular, the inability to increase disability pensions and state social security benefits.⁹

In **Germany**, the situation for disabled individuals is also far from ideal. Even though the German government has taken some important steps to enhance the education, employment, and poverty status of disabled persons, there are still persistent inequities between disabled and non-disabled people. Despite the fact that the labour market had been doing well (up until the Covid-19 crisis), disabled people were not benefiting from it. Their participation in education and employment is still unequal, and the risk of poverty is still present. Furthermore, disabled people are less likely to be working full-time. One big issue that hinders any significant improvements is that there is a lack of data on people with cognitive, mental, or chronic disabilities. Another aspect to consider is that handicapped people, such as those suffering from chronic diseases, face far greater challenges in obtaining necessary assistance. However, these questions are addressed overall in a lot more structured and targeted manner than, for instance, in Latvia.¹⁰

Although there is an EU-wide organization that focuses on disability issues (ANED), there is no specific index with comparable information on equality for people with disabilities. Therefore, for comparison purposes, the figure below

⁹ ANED. (2019). *Country report on the European Semester - Latvia*. Retrieved from <https://www.disability-europe.net/country/latvia>

¹⁰ ANED. (2019). *Country report on the European Semester - Germany*. Retrieved from <https://www.disability-europe.net/country/germany>

includes statistics on the employment rate of people with disabilities between the age of 20 and 64 in the countries analysed in this paper.

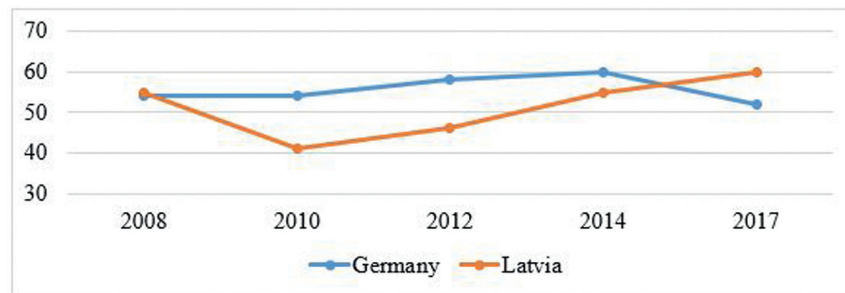


Figure 2. Employment rates of persons with disabilities (%) in Germany and Latvia¹¹

As we can see, the situation is not as straightforward when comparing both countries. In the context of Latvia, it is important to mention that the rapid economic growth in the period after the financial crisis of 2008-2010 also reached persons with disabilities. It should also be emphasized that a number of reforms and support initiatives were introduced during this period, which have largely been possible with the assistance of the EU Structural Funds. Changes like these have been somewhat less targeted and slower in Germany, where, among other things, economic growth was less rapid during this period.¹²

However, when assessing these – employment – and other indicators, it is necessary to keep in mind the proportion of persons with disabilities in a particular society. For example, in Latvia in 2017, the number of people identifiable as disabled was 41% – the highest in the EU (EU average – 25%). Therefore, it is natural that the labour market is considered to be more inclusive, and the employment rate, for example, is relatively high. This also explains the drop in employment in Germany after 2015, which was purely due to a definitional change in that year which reduced the prevalence estimates for people with disabilities. Overall, taking into consideration Germany's consistency and structured approach when dealing with disability-related issues, it can be concluded that the legal barriers for people with disabilities are less restrictive than those in Latvia.

¹¹ ANED. (2019). *Countries*. Retrieved from <https://www.disability-europe.net/country>

¹² Eurostat. (2018). *1 in 4 people in the EU have a long-term disability*. Retrieved from <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/-/EDN-20181203-1>

When analysing societal attitudes, we have to go back to the aforementioned Eurobarometer survey. It is an extensive pool of research that looks at various aspects of biases and stereotypical attitudes towards all our studied groups. To measure how inclusive a society is towards people with disabilities, three variables can be taken into consideration: the level of comfort of having a person with a disability (1) being elected to the highest political position, (2) being a work colleague, (3) and a partner to one's children. In **Latvia**, 73% of the population would feel comfortable with a disabled person obtaining the highest elected political role, with 83% being comfortable with having a colleague with a disability. 65% would feel comfortable with their children dating a person with a disability. On average these three figures make up 73.6%. At the same time, these numbers in **Germany** are 88%, 91% and 84% respectively, averaging out to 87.5%. It can be concluded that on a societal level, people in Germany are more welcoming towards people with disabilities throughout different social settings.¹³

4.2. Women

When analysing the legal situation of women, it is worth mentioning that although legislation in **Latvia** guarantees equal rights for all, regardless of gender, the available resources and their amount differ between men and women. It is beneficial that the legal protection of women in Latvia follows the so-called mainstreaming principle, which means that the standards of gender equality are taken into account when addressing issues and developing new laws in any field and at all levels (as opposed to an ad hoc approach where laws are changed reactively).¹⁴ However, despite the fact that women make up more than half of Latvia's society, women's representation in politics is still unbalanced, which in turn has paved the way for women's justice movements. It is also worth mentioning that the average salary for women is about 18-20% lower than for men, and it is socially expected that women will continue to play traditional gender roles.¹⁵ As a result, in Latvia, for example, the proportion of women who

¹³ Eurobarometer. (2020). *Special Eurobarometer Survey No. 493 "Discrimination in the European Union"*. Retrieved from <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/2251>

¹⁴ UNESCO. (2017). *Gender equality policy in Latvia*. Retrieved from <https://en.unesco.org/creativity/policy-monitoring-platform/gender-equality-policy-latvia>

¹⁵ Dean, L. (2018). *Breaking the Glass Ceiling in Latvia: Slow Progress for Women in 100 Years of Latvian Suffrage*. Retrieved from <https://www.fpri.org/article/2018/10/breaking-the-glass-ceiling-in-latvia-slow-progress-for-women-in-100-years-of-latvian-suffrage/>

have experienced physical or sexual violence from their male partners since adolescence is 33%, which is the worst figure in the EU.¹⁶

As for **Germany**, the past decade has seen a rapid improvement for gender equality with important laws being amended in order to accommodate fair pay for men and women, fair representation and the dismantling of gender-based stereotypes.¹⁷ If we dive in deeper, Germany has progressed the greatest in areas related to health (access to gender-specific health services) and financial independence, but there is still potential for development in the areas of education (e.g. university attendance). In Germany, women still spent more time caring for and educating their children, as well as participating in philanthropic activities, than men. Overall, however, the situation can be described as good and rapidly improving.¹⁸

The graph below shows the changes in the positions of the studied countries in the European Institute for Gender Equality's Gender Equality Index in the period from 2013 to 2020. The index summarizes several indicators on a scale of 1 to 100, with 100 meaning full equality.

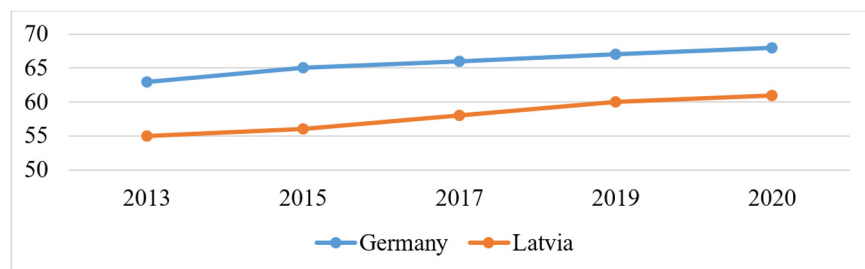


Figure 3. Gender equality (%) in Latvia and Germany in the period 2013-2020¹⁹

As can be seen, gender equality has improved in both countries over the last eight years. In both Latvia and Germany, growth is linked to the overall economic growth that benefitted both men and women. In Latvia, access to medical care has

¹⁶ European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights. (2020). *Vardarbība pret sievietēm — ES mēroga apsekojums*. Retrieved from https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra-2014-vaw-survey-factsheet_lv.pdf

¹⁷ Federal Foreign Office. (2021). *Women and gender equality*. Retrieved from <https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/en/aussenpolitik/themen/menschenrechte/05-frauen/-/227616>

¹⁸ HBA. (2021). *Germany: Facts About the Status of Gender Equality*. Retrieved from <https://www.hbanet.org/news/2021/05/5/germany-facts-about-the-status-of-gender-equality%C2%A0>

¹⁹ EIGE. (2021). *Gender Equality Index*. Retrieved from <https://eige.europa.eu/areas/gender-equality-index-2020-country-factsheets?page=1>

improved significantly since 2010, as has the average monthly salary. However, Latvia ranks last in the EU in terms of the pay gap between men and women.²⁰ In Germany, the increase can be explained by the rapidly growing proportion of women in important positions in both the private and public sectors.²¹ Overall, it can be concluded that women are more protected legally in Germany than in Latvia.

Looking at societal attitudes, we need to consider that women, unlike people with disabilities and the LGBTQ+ community, cannot be considered as a minority group (meaning that a person can be marginalized and socially vulnerable without being of a minority background). Therefore, in this case the only appropriate measure from the available Eurobarometer report that relates to societal attitudes towards women is the social comfort of women being elected to the highest political positions. In Latvia, 82% of respondents have indicated that they would feel “totally comfortable” with that (with another 4% being “moderately” comfortable). In Germany, these figures are 86% and 6% respectively, meaning that women are trusted and respected socially more thoroughly when compared to Latvia.²²

4.3. Sexual minorities

In **Latvia**, LGBTQ+ people daily face a wide range of legal issues and social problems which heterosexuals do not have to face. Both male and female same-sex sexual activities in Latvia are legal, but families forming same-sex couples are not entitled to the same (or partial) legal protection as opposite-sex couples. Namely, in Latvia, same-sex marriages or other types of registered partnerships are not recognized, and joint adoption is also not possible. Along with the democratization processes at the end of the 20th century, several freedoms were introduced for LGBTQ+ persons in Latvia, such as the opportunity to establish organizations and develop infrastructure by opening bars, clubs, libraries, etc.²³ The visibility of the community has also grown, albeit slightly. Nevertheless, the level of tolerance in society still remains low, and for several years Latvia has been recognized as

²⁰ Eurostat. (2021). *Gender pay gap statistics*. Retrieved from https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Gender_pay_gap_statistics

²¹ EIGE. (2021). *Gender Equality Index 2020: Germany*. Retrieved from <https://eige.europa.eu/publications/gender-equality-index-2020-germany>

²² Eurobarometer. (2020). *Special Eurobarometer Survey No. 493 “Discrimination in the European Union”*. Retrieved from <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/2251>

²³ Eng.lsm.lv. (2020). *Latvian Saeima Rejects initiative for registration of same-sex partnerships*. Retrieved from <https://eng.lsm.lv/article/society/society/latvian-saeima-rejects-initiative-for-registration-of-same-sex-partnerships.a379780/>

the worst country in the EU for LGBTQ+ people in the ILGA Europe's Rainbow Europe index.²⁴

In comparison, in **Germany**, after the Bundestag enacted legislation on 30 June 2017 providing same-sex couples with full marital and adoption rights, same-sex marriage has been legal since 1 October 2017. Prior to that, same-sex couples could enter into registered partnerships, which became legal in 2001. These partnerships granted many but not all of the same rights as marriages.²⁵ Discrimination protections based on sexual orientation and gender identity vary by regions, however, discrimination in employment is prohibited throughout the country. Since 1980, transgender people have been able to legally change their gender. Initially, the legislation required full genital surgery in order to legally obtain documentation. Since then, the law has been declared unconstitutional and changed.²⁶ Furthermore, in May 2020, Germany became the fifth country in the world to outlaw conversion therapy for children on a national level.²⁷

In the figure below is a summary of the annual ILGA-Europe LGBTQ + Equality Index "Rainbow Europe" for the period 2015-2020 for Germany and Latvia. The index analyses 75 different factors, looking at family rights, employment rights and other aspects concerning queer people.²⁸

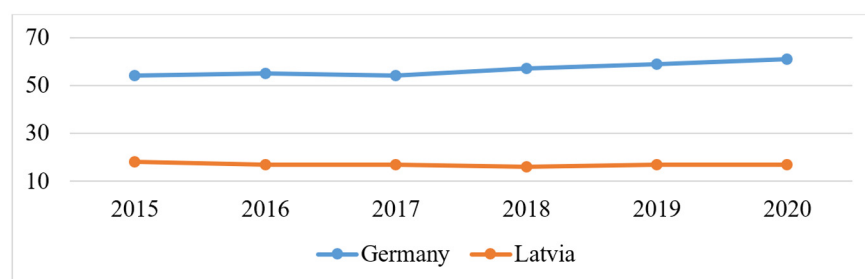


Figure 4. LGBTQ+ equality (%) in Latvia and Germany in the period 2015-2020²⁹

²⁴ Jacobsen, H. (2016). *Latvia is worst place to be gay in EU, index shows*. Retrieved from <https://www.euractiv.com/section/social-europe-jobs/news/latvia-is-worst-place-to-be-gay-in-eu-index-shows/>

²⁵ DW. (2017). *Germany's Bundestag passes bill on same-sex marriage*. Retrieved from <https://www.dw.com/en/germanys-bundestag-passes-bill-on-same-sex-marriage/a-39483785>

²⁶ Equal Rights Trust. (2012). *ERT Notes Steps Taken Around the World Recognising the Gender Identity of Gender Variant Persons*. Retrieved from <https://www.equalrightstrust.org/news/ert-notes-steps-taken-around-world-recognising-gender-identity-gender-variant-persons>

²⁷ BBC. (2020). *Germany passes law banning 'gay conversion therapy' for minors*. Retrieved from <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-52585162>

²⁸ ILGA Europe. (2021). *Rainbow Europe*. Retrieved from <https://www.ilga-europe.org/rainboweurope>

²⁹ Ibid.

As can be seen, significant changes have taken place in Germany over the last six years due to increased protection for gender-nonconforming individuals and the adoption of same-sex marriage. In contrast, no improvement has been observed in Latvia, placing Latvia last within the index for several years in a row. Furthermore, Latvia's score in the index has decreased due to an increase in hate crimes as well as the introduction of the "moral purity" clause within the education legislation, meaning that teachers in schools cannot openly discuss sexuality-related issues. In general, it is clear that the level of equality of LGBTQ+ persons in Germany is high compared to Latvia.

When looking at societal biases, the same variables can be evaluated as in the case of people with disabilities (i.e. the level of comfort of having a homosexual person (1) being elected to the highest political position, (2) being a work colleague, (3) and a partner to one's children). In Latvia, 43% of the population feel comfortable with a gay/lesbian or bisexual person being elected to the highest political office. 54% would be comfortable with having a homosexual work colleague, whereas only 25% would be comfortable with their children dating a same-sex partner. On average, these three variables make up 39.6%. In **Germany**, the numbers are 80%, 83% and 74% respectively, averaging out to 79%. Like the previous cases, in this final one too, it can be concluded that people in Germany are a lot more inclusive of people of a queer background when compared to Latvia.³⁰

5. Conclusions

The figure below summarizes the research analysis. The conclusion can be made that due to different political, economic, and cultural factors, both legal protection as well as societal attitudes are more inclusive towards people of marginalized backgrounds in Germany than in Latvia, in all aspects. Even though Latvia and Germany share a long common history and both are nowadays part of the EU, the impact and strength of various opinion leaders, media, political leaders, and social movements differs vastly, resulting in the stark differences seen below.

Even with economic advancements in Latvia, oftentimes the growth is unequal, focused on those societal groups that are traditionally in charge of the

³⁰ Eurobarometer. (2020). *Special Eurobarometer Survey No. 493 "Discrimination in the European Union"*. Retrieved from <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/2251>

		<i>Legal inclusion</i>	<i>Societal inclusion</i>	<i>Sum</i>
<i>People with disabilities</i>	<i>Latvia</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>0</i>
	<i>Germany</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>Women</i>	<i>Latvia</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>0</i>
	<i>Germany</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>Sexual minorities</i>	<i>Latvia</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>0</i>
	<i>Germany</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>

Figure 5. Overview of the analysis

mechanisms of power, thus the economic benefits may not reach people within socially vulnerable groups (e.g., queer people, those with disabilities and women). This can be observed, for instance, through an increasing pay gap between men and women in Latvia³¹ or the rapidly growing number of hate crimes towards the LGBTQ+ community.³² This means that there are not enough legal support systems in place that would ensure an equal and fair distribution of these benefits and protections. Only through quality education and a push for legal changes could some improvements be possible, as we can learn from the experiences of democratically stable countries such as Germany.

³¹ LSM. (2021). *Latvijā sievietes vidēji pelna par 22,3% mazāk nekā vīrieši*. Retrieved from <https://www.lsm.lv/raksts/zinas/ekonomika/latvija-sievietes-videji-pelna-par-223-mazak-neka-viriesi.a409452/>

³² LSM. (2021). *Pandēmijas laikā pieaug naida runa internetā; arvien vairāk cilvēku sauc pie atbildības*. Retrieved from <https://www.lsm.lv/raksts/zinas/latvija/pandemijas-laika-pieaug-naida-runa-interneta-arvien-vairak-cilveku-sauc-pie-atbildibas.a397046/>



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Kristaps Celmiņš

The Role of the Deutschbalten as a Minority in the Early Political Development of Latvia

Citizens of the newly established Latvia who were Germans, identified themselves as “*Deutschbalten, das baltische Deutschtum*”, acknowledging that they were a separate German branch, which for 700 years had been developing on the shores of the Baltic Sea. The political influence of Baltic Germans in Latvia changed after World War I. Due to the proclamation of the Republic of Latvia, the influence of the local German elite declined as Latvians gained the dominant role for the first time ever, erupting in a wave of nationalism. Nonetheless, at the time of Latvia's proclamation, about a quarter of its population was not Latvian. In 1918, respecting the principles of democracy and civil rights, the People's Council of Latvia gave local foreigners the right to delegate their representatives to legislative bodies. This inclusive attitude was also reflected in the Law on Nationality of 1919, which granted the rights of citizens to almost all people “without nationality and religion” who lived on Latvian territory before World War I.¹ The status of the Baltic Germans in Latvia had changed rapidly within a decade. What was the political influence of Baltic Germans in the early stages of Latvia as a parliamentary republic? How did the Baltic Germans adapt to the change from being the elite to being a minority?

The central unifying element for the Baltic German population after the proclamation of the Republic of Latvia was to achieve the widest possible autonomy for themselves and other national minorities. There were more than 100

¹ LSM.lv (2019) *Tieši pirms 100 gadiem tika noteikts Latvijas pilsoņu loks* <https://www.lsm.lv/raksts/dzive--stils/vesture/tiesi-pirms-100-gadiem-tika-noteikts-latvijas-pilsonu-loks.a329687/>

different German public organisations in Latvia. Therefore, from the early 1920s, Baltic German politicians were looking for ways to consolidate their community. In the new circumstances of an independent state, it was important to achieve German unity in order to claim some form of autonomy in education, the use of the German language, religion, public life, etc.² In the elections for the 1920s Constitutional Assembly, political issues were delegated by the Baltic German citizens to a number of self-formed political parties active at the Constitutional Assembly and in the newly established parliament – the *Saeima*. They later formed a single faction, called the “Committee of the German-Baltic Parties” (*Ausschuß der Deutschbaltischen Parteien*, ADP). There were six Baltic German parties represented in total, each by one individual. This constituted a total of only 4 % of the whole Constitutional Assembly (there were a total of 150 individuals) which made it complicated for Baltic German interests to be voiced sufficiently. The newly elected Latvian Constitutional Assembly held their first meeting on the 1st of May 1920, with the task of determining the state constitution and implementing agrarian reform. The Latvian Constitutional Assembly established a special Constitutional Commission just four days later for the drafting of the Constitution. It was composed of 26 members from the Latvian Constitutional Assembly, one of whom was a Baltic German – Paul Schiemann –, a person who embodied Baltic German political ambitions, mainly to represent them as a minority and develop a set of specific rights.

Paul Schiemann was arguably the central political actor from the Baltic German minority. The Chairman of the Baltic German Democratic Party (*Deutsch-baltische Demokratische Partei*), a member of Constitutional Assemblies, elected as a member of all four Latvian Parliaments (*Saeimas*), the head of the German faction and editor of the *Rigasche Rundschau* newspaper (the main German language newspaper in Latvia), and the most famous Baltic German politician on the parliamentary stage during Latvia’s interwar period. As a member of the political elite, Schiemann presented various, and sometimes controversial, opinions. Paul Schiemann consistently and undoubtedly recognized Latvia as a state. He saw it as a national state and promoted this view among Baltic Germans. He himself, as a part of a minority, defended the multicultural view. He saw the movement for nationalist movement as dangerous and exclusive in the context of minorities. Schiemann rightly emphasized that, in any case, the complexity of European history and settlement, particularly in the East, precluded minority issues ever

² Cerūzis R. (2021) “*Vācbaltiešu tautas apvienība Latvijā*”. Nacionālā enciklopēdija. <https://enciklopedija.lv/skirklis/101231-Vācbaltiešu-tautas-apvienība-Latvijā>

being resolved by the mere redrawing of state borders.³ Therefore, he called for a state where all nationalities would be equal and have cultural autonomy. However, the views of Schiemann at the time were too progressive – they did not correspond to the ideals of Europe’s new nation states and the majority of Latvian society, where national issues were generally regarded as an important sphere of state activity. Schiemann systematically promoted and explained his political conviction in the editor’s column in *Rigasche Rundschau*, but they often faced confusion and protest in both German and Latvian communities, as neither of the national groups was ready to concede that they were not the superior nation.⁴

In democratic states, a constitution is one of the most important symbols of statehood. Along with legal functions, the constitution also has a symbolic meaning – it is a testimony to the dreams of the founding fathers of statehood and the quest for future generations. Baltic Germans took part in the legislative process and introduced the Weimar Constitution (*Weimarer Reichsverfassung*) to the commission. However, one thing should be made clear – the impact of the Baltic Germans and the Weimar Constitution was minor. The common view on the Weimar Constitution as the main model for the drafting of the Constitution is not factually correct. The greatest influence of the Weimar Constitution can be observed in the wording of the provisions of Part II – the rejected and non-ratified part of the Constitution. On the other hand, the structure of the State system was radically different in the ratified Constitution, although the wording of certain norms was derived from the Weimar Constitution. The Constitution was based on the principles of Western parliamentary democracy, primarily the United Kingdom and the Third French Republic. Similarly, the wording of certain rules shows the impact of various other constitutions of the time. The Latvian Constitutional Assembly used the available constitutional framework of other countries widely in its work with the Constitution, creating a unique constitution that was adapted to the legal and social realities of Latvia.⁵ And as for the Baltic German politicians involved in the Constitutional Assembly, the chance of their impacting anything was essentially non-existent. They were just too small compared to the other political forces to leave a major impact.

³ Hiden, J. (1999). *A Voice from Latvia's Past: Paul Schiemann and the Freedom to Practise One's Culture*. The Slavonic and East European Review, 77(4), 680-699. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4212959>

⁴ Cerūzis R. “*Pauls Šīmanis*”. Nacionālā enciklopēdija. <https://enciklopedija.lv/skirklis/101522-Pauls-Šīmanis>

⁵ Pleps J., Plepa D. “*Latvijas Republikas Satversme*”. Nacionālā enciklopēdija. <https://enciklopedija.lv/skirklis/100866-Latvijas-Republikas-Satversme>

Nevertheless, there was actually an opportunity for a Baltic German to take on the position of Prime Minister of Latvia. In December 1927, Gustavs Zemgals (elected president 1927-1930) offered Paul Schiemann to form the new Cabinet of Ministers. Although Schiemann acquired the support of 51 or 52 MPs out of the 100, he considered this support to be too little to develop a stable government, so he resigned from the entrusted mission. However, the German minority succeeded in other ways. It was able to occasionally unite other minorities as well as draw attention to problems and necessary innovations in the political and social system of the Latvian state. In Latvia, the Baltic Germans remained a politically active and organized ethnic group, although they lost some influence after the 1934 Latvian coup d'état. The following decade saw the decline of parliamentarism and democracy in both Germany and Latvia. Following the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, more than 90% of the Baltic Germans were forced to emigrate from the territory of Latvia. At the beginning of 1920, there were 58,097 and at end of 1939, 54,567 Germans among Latvian citizens. By 15 December 1939, the statistics show that 46,954 Germans had emigrated from Latvia.⁶ This was the last day during peaceful times that there were more than 10,000 German citizens permanently living in Latvia.

Whatever the developments after 1939, one thing is clear: Baltic German politicians in Latvia were active, especially in the process of drafting the Constitution, and developed a strong minority political faction during the first period of Latvia's independence. The long history of Baltic Germans in Latvia ensured that they were able to distinguish and present their interests strongly in the newly formed state. However, the nationalist wave that took over the Latvians hindered the Baltic Germans' chances of gaining an important role in the Constitutional Assembly, or later in parliament. Moreover, they focused mainly on minority rights, promoting cultural rights that did not gain support among Latvians. The Baltic Germans stayed unified as a minority due to such individuals as Paul Schiemann, and functioned fully as a core minority in Latvia till late 1939.

Today, when the Baltic Germans and their lifestyle have been almost entirely consigned to history, there is a new interest in Latvia in what they had been, how they had lived, and what they had seen in Latvia. Their cultural and political impact is undeniable. However, it has been made clear that the Baltic Germans are a part of history now. Latvian society and the government in the 1990s made

⁶ Feldmanis, I. (2016). *From the report by Mārgers Skujnieks, Director of the Latvian National Statistics Office, to the President of State and Ministers, Kārlis Ulmanis (24 April 1940) Vācbaltieši Latvijā (1918-1941) : vēstures avotu krājums*. Rīga: LU Akadēmiskais apgāds.

sure of that – a wave of Latvian nationalism exterminated any possibility of them returning. Their houses were nationalised, and their culture was forgotten. The importance of the Baltic Germans is being discussed more in the last few years and their cultural impact is being revisited and restored, but it is too late to bring the Baltic Germans back. After more than 80 years since the mass emigration, their successors come to Latvia only to visit, not to stay.



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Nils Mosejonoks

A Brief History of Christianity in Latvia and German Organizational Support for Church Communities in Latvia Between 1990 and 2020

This year we celebrate the 30th anniversary of the renewal of diplomatic relations between the Federal Republic of Germany and the Republic of Latvia. Germany's relations with Latvia have historically been interesting, not only in the bilateral context, but in the context of European history over several centuries. It could even be argued that the entire written history of the territory of Latvia was impacted by the arrival of traders, knights and the Christian missionaries from Northern Germany in the 12th-13th centuries. This arrival had a significant socio-economic, political and cultural impact and led to its inclusion into the Christian area of Western Europe.

There are 1.9 million people living in Latvia today, some 62% of whom are Latvians, with 25% Russians. The ethnic composition of Latvian residents, as well as the historical context, have led to approximately 34% of Latvia's population considering themselves to belong to the Lutheran Church, 25% to the Roman Catholic Church, and 17% as being Orthodox. It should be noted that there is no single dominating religion. This has contributed to the development of ecumenism between the churches in Latvia and close cooperation between different Christian denominations and their representatives. If the country's adherence to the values of the Western world, such as democracy, the rule of law and human rights in the 21st century, is confirmed by its membership of the European Union and NATO, its belonging to the Western cultural territory of Europe rather than that of the Eastern world in the Middle Ages was first evidenced by religion.

The beginning and origins of the Christianization of Latvia

Western Christianity entered the territory of Latvia, at the latest, in the third quarter of the 12th century, when Meinhard, an Augustinian monk from Segeberg, baptized the Livonians of Ikšķile – a town then known in German as Uexküll. Around 1186, the Archbishop of Bremen, Hartwig von Utlede, blessed him as the first bishop of the territory. The Bishop of Ikšķile, Albert (German Albrecht von Buxthoeven) moved his residence from Ikšķile to Riga and was successful in achieving the separation of the diocese from the Hamburg-Bremen metropolis. In 1255, the Riga diocese was raised to the level of a metropolis¹.

Latvia's Christianization in the 13th century was an integral part of the Crusades in Europe, as the territory in the north-east of Europe had become the last unbaptised territory in Europe. In the High Middle Ages, it was virtually impossible to separate religion from the common vision of politics and, at that time, it was the sacred and honourable thing to baptize a territory. The Christianization of the territory of Latvia, in the sense of the Latvian nation, was an unjustifiably overrated event. This was mainly due to the exposure of the residents of Latvia to social suppression, economic exploitation and German domination over the ensuing centuries. Unlike in other European countries, including Eastern European countries such as Lithuania and Poland, where the local aristocracy and peasants were mostly representatives of the same nation, in the territory of the current Latvian state, there was not only a social, but also a national division – a German aristocracy and Latvian people as peasants. The myth of “Latvia's 700 years of slavery” was promoted as a result of this in the 19th century and especially during the interwar period in the 20th century.

It was the Christian Church and its entry in the 13th century that transformed the landscape of Latvia's territory. The silhouettes of more and more towns and cities began to be dominated by church towers. Church festivals, church days, as well as the awareness of religious values and a religious worldview intruded. The Christian Church performed not only a religious function in the Medieval and New Ages, but also developed a value system, a cultural tradition (such as choir music and sacral art), and preserved historical memory in written sources.

¹ <https://enciklopedija.lv/skirklis/22182-Roman-kato-%C4%BCu-bazn-%C4%ABca-Latvij-%C4%81>

Early confessional diversity

The territory of Latvia was one of the places where the Reformation events taking place in Northern Germany also spread in the 16th century. A major factor in the coming centuries was the formation of the Latvian nation, and the Enlightenment-era congregation Hernhutian movement in the 18th and 19th centuries. The importance of the Hernhutian movement in the life of Latvia's religion, culture and society is well demonstrated by the fact that the Hernhutian's congregation house became the first State protected monument in Latvia in 1924, when a Latvian list of cultural monuments in the newly founded state of Latvia (1918) was compiled. Located in Vidzeme, in the Kaugurs village of Gaida, it was an important witness to the spiritual awakening of nation-building and the hernhounds is an ethnographical monument the importance of which is considered to be extraordinary.² German Lutheran pastor Ernst Glück translated the Bible into Latvian in the 17th century and founded the first Latvian schools in Vidzeme, while Gottfried Stender wrote a Latvian grammar book and dictionary. The German clergy played an important role in developing the Latvian (written) language in the Latin alphabet in the 18th and 19th centuries and were the first to also begin the process of preserving the Latvian traditional folk song heritage.

In the 19th century, serfdom was abolished on Latvia's territory. The population in the cities increased due to the Industrial Revolution and the related urbanisation process, a sense of national pride increased, resulting in the formation of the Latvian nation, as well as the secularisation of society. It should also be mentioned that the tradition of choir music singing and the Song Festivals, which are typical of the Baltic States, began in the 19th century. Traditional Latvian folk-song texts and melodies were used in the lyrics, and are the first successful Latvian attempts to preserve the traditional musical lyrics of their own people. Rehearsals were held due to the influence of German efforts.³

In the 19th century, the confessional diversity of Latvia also developed – Lutheran, Roman Catholic, Orthodox, Baptist and other religious groups lived peacefully together in Latvia.

² <https://www.lsm.lv/raksts/kultura/kulturtelpa/pastkarte-from-pagaten-First-State-Protected-Monument-latvia-bralu-parishioners-saiesana-House-gaide.a.411311/>

³ https://www.jvlma.lv/data/sadala_muzikas_akademijas_raksti/2007.pdf

Religious life in independent Latvia

After the First World War and the War of Independence, on the founding of the Latvian state in 1918, the country had lost about 1/3 of its population. Of the 499 Latvian parishes, 251 were war-torn, while there were trenches and various fortifications in 274 parishes. In the course of the war, 78,278 buildings were completely destroyed, including many churches and parish buildings.⁴ After the war, the new state of Latvia had to rebuild its broken infrastructure, as well as to establish a new government. During the interwar parliamentary period, Latvia had good relationships with the minorities living in the country – the German, Russian, Jewish and other minorities. The nationalisation of property took place at this time, however, and the German community was the one most directly affected by this nationalisation. For example, the Riga Dome Church became the Latvian Lutheran Cathedral, while St. Jacob's Cathedral was assigned to the Roman Catholic Church. Similar changes occurred elsewhere in Latvia. For example in Liepāja, Jelgava and Daugavpils, where the main churches that had previously belonged to German congregations, were now managed by Latvian congregations. In spite of this, religious life took place peacefully until the beginning of the Second World War, and relations between the German and the Latvian people were characterised by a common togetherness. The situation began to change with the coup d'état by the nationalist authoritarian leader Karlis Ulmanis in 1934, and the overall situation in Europe at that time. On 23rd of August 1939, Nazi Germany and the USSR agreed on a treaty of non-aggression, (the Molotov - Ribbentrop Pact, also known as the Hitler-Stalin Pact) and divided Europe into spheres of interest in a secret protocol. A few days later, Germany started the Second World War and the Baltic Germans were consequently forced to leave the Baltic States. About 50,000 people left Latvia in a few weeks. The emigration is often incorrectly referred to as “repatriation” or a return to the home country, as it was presented at the time by the two totalitarian powers, the USSR and the Third Reich. Germany was not a motherland for most Baltic Germans, because they had lived in the Baltics (today's Estonia and Latvia) for many generations. The oldest families, such as the Liveni (German Lieven, Swedish Liewen), Ikskili (German Uexküll, Yxkull, Uxkull), Patkuli (German Patkul), Rozeni (German Rosen), Tezenhausen (German Tiesenhausen) had lived in Latvia since the 13th century. A large proportion of the German community was ethnically mixed.⁵

⁴ <https://enciklopedija.lv/skirklis/20833-First-World-War-%C5%A1-Latvij-%C4%81>

⁵ <https://enciklopedija.lv/skirklis/101209>

Defying Soviet state atheism

Following the occupation and annexation of Latvia by the USSR in 1940 and after the Second World War, the Soviet authorities began to immediately nationalise Latvian churches and to destroy many of them. The persecution, arrest, torture and deportation of priests and bishops to prisons and labour camps in Siberia also took place. For example, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Latvia suffered a huge loss in the first post-Second World War years – when most pastors either left Latvia, or had died. Most of the church's leadership, along with Archbishop Teodors Grīnbergs, went into exile. He continued to lead the Latvian Evangelical Church and to serve as Archbishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Latvia in exile, from Esslingen, until his death in 1962. Latvian archbishop Elmārs Ernsts Rozītis was also later based in Esslingen. There were not enough pastors to serve parishioners, either in the cities or in the countryside, as a result of the war. The Soviet army and the administration used the Lutheran churches and parish houses for their own purposes during the war.⁶ There was a similar situation with Catholic parishes.

Church historian J. Talonen writes that the Soviet state had an aggressive policy in Latvia from the outset, and exerted strong pressure on the church, limiting its freedom of action. The entire property of the church was taken over by the state, yet most of it could be leased by the church for the needs of the country's religion. The treatment of the pastors was very negative; they were assimilated into the non-working class, and this, of course, severely undermined their social status. The Soviet administration took a lot of time and put great effort into undermine the Christian Church's influence. The pastors' houses and the land owned by them, as well as church properties, were nationalised. Parishioners were bullied and repressed. But as the pastors were, and remained, the centre of the congregation (because not everyone could be shot or deported), a powerful ideological and socially political effort was directed against them.

Powerful anti-religious propaganda and the many restrictions on church work led to a new situation. Religious activity was reduced to services in churches, and any outwardly directed activity (work with youth, the mission, evangelism or charity) encountered great resistance.⁷

⁶ https://www.apgads.lu.lv/fileadmin/user_upload/lu_portal/apgads/PDF/Rakstu_krajumi/lu.sz.k.1.rk.05-Grinvalde.pdf

⁷ <https://latvijasluteranis.lv/2013/09/14/lelb-stavoklis-padomju-laika/>

In Soviet times, many churches were desecrated, with the setting up of concert halls, gyms or grain warehouses in them, or their use for other purposes. In Riga, for example, the Dome Cathedral was a concert hall during the occupation by the USSR, the Anglican church was a disco hall, and the Orthodox cathedral – a planetarium and a café.

In his memoirs, the Latvian Cardinal emeritus Janis Pujats of the Roman Catholic Church recalls that the situation improved slightly in the 1980s. Gorbachev was not a persecutor of faith. If the Church paid taxes or an annuity, or insurance, the church could continue to work. It should be noted that all churches were formally owned by the state and the Soviet authorities wanted the congregations to pay for their use. At the time, the Catholics paid for each church service, and therefore managed to save most churches from being destroyed during the USSR's occupation. The taxes were high. For example, Riga's largest Catholic church – St. Albert's Church – had to pay 6,000 roubles per year for using the church. For comparison, wages for factory workers were on average 70-100 roubles per month at the time. However, the Soviet administration continued to place obstacles on the ideological side – teaching children about matters of faith was not possible. And, during the Soviet era, new churches could not be built, only the old ones repaired. The church was not allowed to rise again. There was a godless government on the one side and the people who were believers, on the other.⁸

The religious awakening and German help

The situation began to change at the end of the 1980s. Along with the USSR's leader, Mikhail Gorbachev's policies of openness and reconstruction, and the national awakening movement in Latvia and other countries behind the Iron Curtain, the movement towards recovering independence began. The Church also played an important role at this time, as it represented spiritual values which were denied during the occupation by the USSR. The Church opposed the USSR policies and also symbolised the resistance to the Communist dictatorship, from which the Church itself had suffered during the occupation era. In the population's social historical memory, the Church was associated with family histories, with the acceptance of the ancestral traditions of baptism, and the sacraments of marriage,

⁸ An interview with Cardinal emeritus Jānis Pujats of the Roman Catholic Church took place on 28 June 2021 in Riga

which were banned during the Soviet years. Church buildings were symbols within the landscapes of almost every city or village in Latvia. The Church also symbolised Latvia's, and Latvian, membership of the Christian culture of the West and its values, which the Communists tried to deny and alter during the USSR's occupation. As a result, the number of believers increased rapidly during the years of the national awakening. Along with the opportunity of going to church without fear, there was also a need for the reconstruction of churches. New churches also needed to be built where they were no longer standing.

The support of German organisations and private donors to Latvia for the construction and reconstruction of churches, as well as social and educational work in congregations and communities has been invaluable since the renewal of the Republic of Latvia in 1990. This selfless support helped put the church back on its feet in the early 1990s, and continues nowadays. The Roman-Catholic Church received the main support from German organizations due to the strong network of Catholic organisations in Germany, and the successful cooperation launched in the early 1990s. It was commenced by both Latvian exiles living in Germany and the organisations themselves, which wanted to contribute to the countries of Eastern Europe and their churches after 50 years of persecution and oppression by the Communist regime.

Cardinal Janis Pujats, who during the period 1991-2010 performed duties at the Archdiocese of Riga, pointed out that there were only 3-4 churches outside of Riga in the early 1990s. People needed churches. The Germans were the first to initiate cooperation opportunities and to address the cardinal. The main organisation which engaged in the construction of churches and the provision of support at the time was Bonifatius Werk. Each new church was mainly funded by German congregations and organizations. Over the past 30 years, they have supported the construction of more than 40 new churches in Latvia. Support came not only for the construction of churches, but also through a variety of seminars, so that congregations could actively carry out social work, work with young people and the local community. Aid was also received for the construction of the Ikšķile Monastery and recollection houses in different places all over Latvia. In general, the cardinal points out that major aid came from German organizations and congregations. "On our part, we couldn't give anything special in return, but German honour and the organizations, were glad to be able to help the life of the Church when we were released from Soviet capture. This is very important because new congregations were organised and, consequently, active social work in the local community. The representatives of the organisations themselves went to meet personally, to see the local situation, and came to help. The representatives

were delighted that congregations developed from their funds. There were no financially strong parishes in the Archdiocese of Riga, we could not have done it by ourselves without the help of German organizations” said the Cardinal.

German support in strengthening the church in Latvia

While support from German organisations was essentially related to the construction and renovation of churches during the first decade after the restoration of independence, over the past decade, aid has become more diverse and more focused on strengthening congregations and communities, as well as developing a social mission in the Church of Latvia. In many ways, this is due to the current Archbishop of Riga, Zbigņevs Stankevičs.

In conversation, the Archbishop pointed out that over the last 10 years, the Church of Latvia has been supported by several dioceses in Germany, such as the Cologne Archdiocese, the Diocese of Munster and the Diocese of Freiburg, as well as a number of organisations such as Renovabis, Kirche In Not and Bonifatius Werk. The main aid was received directly from Bonifatius Werk, accounting for 66% of the total funding received from German organisations over the past 10 years.⁹ According to the Archbishop, there are several reasons why German organisations have supported Latvian parishes and their development, both after the restoration of independence and later. Undeniably, Latvia’s relative proximity to Germany, as well as Germany’s interest in the Eastern European region as a whole, are important factors. The role of Germany and Baltic Germans in the history of Latvia and the promotion of historical justice are also relevant in this matter. Another factor is that there is a compulsory church tax in Germany that is passed on by the state to the respective congregations or religious organisations to which each resident belongs. This circumstance, along with German society’s inherent desire to support solidarity-oriented projects, has contributed to the fact that the German church and organisations have the financial means to provide support to other countries, including Latvia.

In recent years, many Latvian congregations and organisations have used the opportunity of obtaining funding from Bonifatius Werk. The Caritas organisation has, for example, established a daily centre for people with special needs through this funding, the House of Bethlehem charity house in Riga has opened a soup

⁹ The interview with the Roman Catholic Church’s Metropolitan Archbishop Zbigņevs Stankevičs took place in Riga on 30th June 2021.

kitchen, as well as providing other kinds of assistance to poor people. At the moment, the House of Bethlehem has also become an example of the church’s cooperation with the Riga Municipality, which uses this service and financially supports this initiative, thereby contributing to the sustainable development of this and similar projects.

In Latvia, the Radio Maria Christian radio station has also been operating for 5 years, with the costs for their premises having been supported by the Bonifatius Werk organisation.

The Bonifatius Werk organization works to provide assistance to Catholics in the countries in which they are a minority.¹⁰ In 2018, for example, this organisation supported 1,254 projects in eastern Germany, as well as in the Baltic and Nordic countries in total, with an overall investment of €15.5 million. Because of this organisation, there are now 23 “Bonifatius Werk” vans in Latvia, helping local congregations and parishes to organise various activities and trips. Bonifatius Werk trainees also come to the Baltic and Nordic countries annually to provide support to congregations.¹¹

Other German organisations have also actively supported the Latvian Church in recent years. One of them is Renovabis, a charity at the Roman Catholic Church in Germany, which was established in 1993 to help people in Eastern Europe and Central Europe. It has spent about \$400 million on private donations for 14,000 aid projects in 28 countries.

The construction of new churches has taken place in Latvia, with the support of Renovabis, as has the development of pastoral work. One of the most important examples of this is the support by Renovabis in commencing the prison chaplains service and creating a system that operates daily, thereby providing mental support to the community in prison. This project is continuing with parishes in Latvia being involved, to ensure the long-term functioning of the system. With the support of Renovabis, another recent project has strengthened the church in Latvia. It involved the development of an online donation platform, which has been an important way to strengthen the church during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Over the last decade, a network of Caritas congregations has been developing with the support of the German Renovabis organisation. It develops the training of parish servants. Every week, 30 people have the opportunity to receive food

¹⁰ <https://katolis.lv/2018/06/bonifatiuswerk-parstavji-tiekas-klatiene-ar-musu-kulturu-un-baznicu/>

¹¹ <https://katolis.lv/2019/07/bonifatiuswerk-rikoja-latvijai-veltitu-pecpusdienu/>

packages at St. Jacobs Cathedral in Riga, while parish servants visit homes to see the actual situation and provide support to those in difficulty, regardless of their confessional affiliation. Evangelisation takes place through gospel work, the radio and media, including through the school of evangelism and family missions.

The third significant German organisation is Kirche In Not. One of their most important accomplishments in recent years is the process of rebuilding the Cathedral of Jacob in 2016, as well as the introduction of the catechesis of the Good Shepherd to work with children. Archbishop Zbigņevs Stankevičs also has personal memories of the support provided by Kirche In Not: “When I became a priest, only a year later, I learned that the organization supported young priests and provided the opportunity to receive 9,000 Deutsche Marks for the purchase of a new car. I used this opportunity, and the organization gave me money for the first car in my life. In 2001, I began writing my application for doctoral studies in Rome. The first response was negative because I was 47 years old. However, at the request of Cardinal Janis Pujats, I received funding for 4-year studies.”

The Archbishop’s words highlight another fundamental way that German organizations have supported the Church – essentially all priests who have studied abroad have used German scholarships. German organizations have also made the academic growth of young priests who are still studying possible. A social academy is organised every summer. It is a summer school for seminarians from Eastern Europe hosted by the Paderborns Archdiocese and the “Coming Dortmund” social institute. The institute specializes in church social training in research and development. Every year, seminarists from Latvia are invited to learn the church’s social teaching doctrine and practical manifestations for two weeks in the summer. In Germany, there were visits to churches, hospitals etc., as well as lectures during this academy.

In recent years, German organisations have also supported public activities, the development of youth work in the church, the “Balta” choir, which had an opportunity to have a concert outside of Latvia, and provided many other donations to promote the development of congregations and parishes.

As to the most important projects of recent years, Archbishop Zbigņevs Stankevičs mentions the building-heating project for three important building complexes – the Riga Catholic Seminary, the Archbishop’s residence and the Curia house in Old Riga. This has created an opportunity for increasing the energy efficiency of the buildings, which is a great saving on heating costs over the winter period. Currently, there are also renovation works going on at the St. Jacob’s Cathedral, which are supported by Kirche In Not. The Archbishop also welcomes the Charity House of Bethlehem, the development of the Riga

Catholic Gymnasium, and German support for higher education. Development is taking place in the fields of pastoral work, education, evangelisation and in the cultural field.

“We owe huge support to German organisations and German Catholics”

Archbishop Zbigņevs Stankevičs is very grateful for the German efforts in helping to re-establish and develop faith, pastoral work and church life in Latvia. He says: “We owe huge support to German organisations and German Catholics that, thanks to their support, we, the Catholic Church of Latvia, have been able to restart the activities of the congregations after the Soviet times. We have built churches in the main district centres. Currently, existing churches, educational and pastoral institutions are maintained through German organisations and congregations. We are in a much better situation than we were 30 years ago from an infrastructure point of view.”

The Archbishop points out that today the Church has a network of congregations and parishes. But there are also some challenges. The main ones are how to provide congregations with clerics and active gospel preachers. For parishes, it is important that those churches that they helped build up are full of people and the directions are gradually changing in 21st century. “We want to expand radio, Catholic television, activate the pastoral pathway of the congregations, and go along the sinological path – to involve the congregation and the believers in co-responsibility for the church, in carrying out the mission of evangelism. We work on this with radio, the Church information agency, evangelisation schools, family missions, matrimonial appointments, alpha courses and other initiatives, most of which have also been supported by German organisations over the past 30 years. The German charity mission and hearts have been very open” the Archbishop says.

In conclusion, it can be said that over the past 30 years, the support provided by German organisations and dioceses to the Church of Latvia has been invaluable for recovering from the material damage suffered during the 50-year Soviet occupation. It has also stimulated the lives of local congregations and communities, thereby not only helping the Church but also children, young people, families in difficulty, people in custody and many other people. During these years, about 20 new churches have been built in the Riga Archdiocese, with a total of about 40 in Latvia. New monasteries, recollection houses, renovated buildings have been

created, with the development of strategic and sustainable social and pastoral work, strengthening local congregations and communities. Undeniably, in looking for similarities, the last few years have developed dignified cooperation between the Church of Latvia and German organisations and dieticians, comparable to renewal and revival. Archbishop Zbigņevs Stankevičs outlines both his reflections and shares his vision for the future: “Christianity came in Latvia with the help of the missionary Meinhard. It was the territory of German missionaries at the time, in the 12th and 13th centuries. In the post-Soviet era, too, we had to restart the mission that Meinhard launched on the territory of Latvia – re-Christianisation, which German support allowed us to accomplish.

We need to learn from the German Church, a generosity, a social and charity dimension. However, we do not want to be consumers and share with them things which we have. What we can be proud of is our tradition of pilgrimage, an ecumenical project called “St. Jacob Road – Camino Latvia”. The route also goes through Germany. The tradition of the rosary, adoration. We want to say that it is a great blessing and to be thankful for the gifts we can give to each other.”

