

# STATE LANGUAGE POLICY

## OVERVIEW

The Latvian language is the official state language in the Republic of Latvia and the language for society integration, basis of national identity and part of the varied cultural heritage of the world. The Latvian language belongs to the languages having old writing, with a standardized literary language form already since the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Among more than 6000 languages of the world, the Latvian language is approximately the 150th biggest language, taking into account the number of users of the Latvian language at the moment. The number of native speakers of Latvian in the world reaches at least 1,5 million people.

The State Language Law (in effect from year 2000) determines regulation of the Latvian language as the official language, and ensures the maintenance, protection and development of the Latvian language.

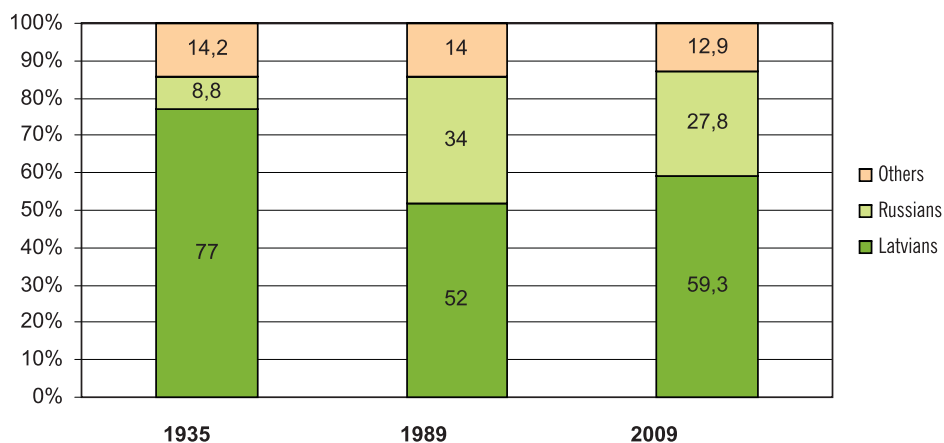
Since 2004 when Latvia joined the European Union the Latvian language has gained the status of the official language of the European Union. The major competitor languages of Latvian in the linguistic area of Latvia are two big languages – Russian and English, both having high economic value. To strengthen the position of the Latvian language it is necessary to implement the targeted state language policy.

The Guidelines of the State Language Policy for 2005–2014 are being implemented to ensure the sustainability, linguistic quality and competitiveness of the Latvian language as the state language and the official language of the European Union in the market of languages of Latvia and the world.

## STATE LANGUAGE IN FIGURES

According to the data of population census in 2000, the Latvian language is the native language for 58,2% of inhabitants in Latvia. According to the ethnodemographic structure of inhabitants in Latvia and cultural heritage and customs in society Latvian, Russian, Ukrainian, Belarusian, Polish, Lithuanian, Estonian, Gipsy (Roma), Liiv and other languages are used. Due to the low birth rate the number of users of Latvian as the native language decreases for about 5000 people (0,3%) every year.

Changes in national composition of the inhabitants in Latvia



Source: Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia

## DEVELOPMENT

Till 2009 the tasks set initially have been put into practice – change in language hierarchy has taken place; the development and standardisation of the state language as well as its scientific research are being ensured; as a result of organising language acquisition the language proficiency among the inhabitants of Latvia has grown significantly: according to the population census in 1989 only 23% of national minorities could use the Latvian language, in 2000 – 53%, in 2009 – about 92%. Since 2001 every year during the European Day of Languages the society gets acquainted with the diversity of languages, the interest to acquire other European Union languages is created and the role of the Latvian language as the official language of the European Union and the state language in the Republic of Latvia is promoted.

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By signing agreements with Diaspora specialists from Russian Federation and Ireland the support is provided for the Latvian Diaspora abroad, as well as the professional development programme for Diaspora specialists has been implemented and teaching aids and coursebooks have been published. Starting 2005 the working conditions for teachers of Latvian are ensured in 10 places in Russian Federation and Ireland to teach the Latvian language, culture and folklore.

Within the Programme on Solidarity and Management of Migration Flows 2007-2013 and the framework of European Integration Fund for nationals of third countries in the European Union, the Ministry of Education and Science in collaboration with the Latvian Language Agency in 2010 will implement the project "Adaptation programme and development of materials for children aged 6 to 12 of nationals of third countries in the European Union" and in the framework of this project it is planned to develop adaptation programme for children of nationals of third countries in the European Union who will acquire basic education in Latvia.

Together with the joint stock company "Datorzinību Centrs" the co-financed project from the European Integration Fund for nationals of third countries in the European Union "The e-learning course for the acquisition of the Latvian language for nationals of third countries in the European Union to promote the access to education and labour market". The aim of this project is to develop electronic study programme allowing the nationals of third countries in the European Union acquire the Latvian language (language proficiency level A1 and A2) and gain knowledge about Latvia as a country, its history, geography and social life.

The current language policy focuses on the following tasks: 1) to support the scientific research and development of the Latvian language in the field of IT; 2) to support maintenance of the Latvian language for the Latvian Diaspora and the acquisition of the Latvian language abroad; 3) to foster qualitative application of the Latvian language in public area; 4) to foster the improvement and development of the Latvian language in its traditional cultural environment.

## SUPPORT FROM STRUCTURAL FUNDS IN 2007-2013

By implementing ESF project of national programme "The Latvian language acquisition", 2128 secondary school teachers of Latvian and bilingual studies raised their professional qualification in one of the 15 professional development programmes; methodological materials were developed in 10 subjects, 28 coursebooks and 10 methodological materials in DVD format were developed and published.

Till 2011 the ESF project "Support for State language acquisition and bilingual education" will be implemented with the aim to provide methodological support for teachers in general and initial vocational education to ensure the modern acquisition of the Latvian language and effective application of bilingual education.

## INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

It is planned to further support university students and teaching staff from foreign countries to acquire the Latvian language and promote an understanding about state language policy in Latvia. Financial support is provided to ensure the lectures of the Latvian language in the University of Washington (Seattle) and Charles University in Prague.

It is also planned to further ensure the shipment of printed works in Latvian (magazines, literary works, etc.) to the Westphalian Wilhelms-University of Munster, Ernst Moritz Arndt University of Greifswald, Vytautas Magnus University Kaunas, Vilnius University, Siauliai University, Saint-Petersburg State University, the University of Klaipeda, Stockholm University and the University of West Hungary etc., thereby supporting 20 foreign academic and scientific institutions, which provide Latvian language studies and research.

The State Agency "Latvian Language Agency" in collaboration with the specialists in education from Georgia and experts from the Soros Foundation-Latvia will continue exchanging experience and provide methodological support in the process of implementation of Georgian as the state language and bilingual education in the Georgian education system.

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