

# Latvia national day

## Relationship of trust and understanding spans almost a century

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AMBASSADOR OF LATVIA

It is a great honor to address the readers of The Japan Times and the people of Japan on the occasion of the 95th Anniversary of the Proclamation of Independence of Latvia on Nov. 18, 1918.



On behalf of the people of Latvia and the President of Latvia, H.E. Andris Berzins, I would like to express our deepest respect to Their Imperial Majesties Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko, to Prime Minister H.E. Shinzo Abe and the people of Japan.

Latvia is favorably geographically located in the middle of Northern Europe, at the crossroads of historical trading routes connecting Scandinavia, Western Europe and Russia.

Latvia has a long and very complex history, leading to the creation of an independent state

in 1918. Japan along with the other members of the international community recognized Latvia's independence in 1921, the same year Latvia also became a member of the League of Nations, the predecessor of the United Nations.

During the next two decades Latvia turned into a prosperous country, with one of the highest living standards in Europe. Latvia's independence was interrupted in 1940 when the country was forcibly incorporated into the Soviet Union in the wake of World War II. Latvia regained its independence in 1991, re-established diplomatic relations with the members of international community, joined the United Nations, and set the goal to join the European Union and NATO.

Next year Latvia not only will mark its 10th anniversary of joining NATO and the EU, but will also join the eurozone Jan. 1, 2014. The opening of official talks for accession to the OECD in 2013 shows that Latvia's eco-



**Cultural capital: The House of the Blackheads in the old town of Riga** JURIS KALNINS (FOTOCENTRS)/THE LATVIAN INSTITUTE

nomics development has been acknowledged internationally.

The Lonely Planet named Riga as the 4th Top City to visit in 2014, describing it as the "cosmopolitan cornerstone of the Baltics." Latvia is known to be

one of the greenest countries in Europe with its abundant nature and diverse landscapes; as well as a country with deep historical roots and rich culture. The capital Riga is listed as a UNESCO World Heritage site and is

famous for one of the largest collections of fine Art Nouveau architecture in the world. In summer 2013 Riga became a place where Latvians from all over the world gathered to sing and dance in the UNESCO-listed "Latvia Song and Dance Festival," which has taken place once every five years since 1873. During the finals, choir groups consisting of more than 30,000 singers joined together on stage to sing well-known Latvian folk songs and unite the public. This year's Song and Dance Festival was very special as two Japanese choirs joined the Latvian singers on stage.

The relations between Latvia and Japan have developed in a steady manner of mutual trust and understanding for almost a century, but it was the historical visit of Their Imperial Majesties Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko to Latvia in May 2007 that has given the strongest boost to fortify our cordially vibrant and fruitful relationship.

For the last seven years since

the Embassy of Latvia was established in Japan, we have been blessed with a friendship and eagerness of our Japanese partners to work together toward even closer cooperation between our two countries. Regular visits by high-level officials, and increases in business exchanges, the number of tourists and grass-roots-level contacts between our two countries continue to grow. We welcome our Japanese partners, friends and those interested, to be even more active in approaching our country. Particularly we would like to invite Japanese people to visit Latvia next year as Riga will be the European Capital of Culture for 2014, thus giving the unique opportunity to visitors to sample the riches of its culture and performing arts.

I would also like to express my gratitude to The Japan Times for giving us this opportunity to publish this article, and congratulations to all Latvians living in Japan and abroad, on this very special day.



**Shipmates: Riga has been involved in the Tall Ship Races 2013 sailing regatta organized by the Sail Training International organization.** SANDRA IRISTE/THE LATVIAN INSTITUTE

**Congratulations  
to the People of the Republic of Latvia  
on the 95th Anniversary of  
Their Independence**

**Japan Latvia Society In Kansai**

3-3-5, Umeda, Kita-ku, Osaka