

## COUNTRY FACTSHEETS, EURASIAN NARCOTICS:

### LATVIA 2004

#### General Information

Population: 2,319,203 (2004)  
UNDP 2004 Human development index ranking: 36 (out of 177)  
TI 2004 Corruption indicators: 4 (0 highly corrupt, and 10 highly clean)

Local drug abuse in Latvia has increased substantially over the last decade. Amphetamines, cannabis and heroin are the most commonly used drugs. Latvia's geographical situation makes it a transit country for drugs flowing from Central Asia, via Russia and onwards to the Nordic countries, as well as for synthetic drugs produced in Europe destined for the CIS countries. Latvia has made substantial efforts to curb the drug trade and the related issues of money laundering and corruption. However, lack of funding and coordination between governmental organs and programs designed for this purpose remain a problem, and the drug trade and abuse in Latvia is currently increasing.

#### Smuggling of Drugs

Although the opportunities to cultivate and produce illicit drugs exist, such production is not a major problem in Latvia. Latvia is transshipment point for opiates and cannabis from Central and Southwest Asia to Western Europe and Scandinavia. This trade is primarily done via Russia. Following the U.S. intervention in Afghanistan, the availability of heroin in Latvia decreased, with seizures dropping from concentration levels of 80% in 2001 to an average of 6 to 30 % in 2002 through 2003. Since then however, both availability and concentration levels have increased substantially. Cocaine from Latin America and synthetic drugs, primarily amphetamines from Lithuania, the Netherlands and Poland, trafficked via Latvia to the CIS. Latvia is not a producer of, but has become a destination as well as a transit country for, precursor chemicals. This trade originates in Lithuania, transits via Latvia on to Estonia and thereafter into the Nordic market. The amount of confiscated precursors has increased substantially in the last few years.

#### Health and Economic Aspects

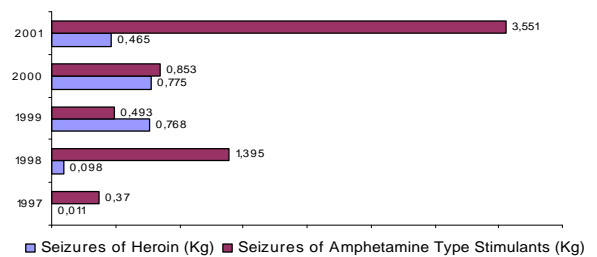
**Corruption:** Corruption is a major problem in Latvia, and there is evidence of unlawful lobbying and similar practices. However, there is no evidence of corruption within senior levels of the Latvian government. Today, the public service and the police are two areas within the Latvian state that remain highly affected by corruption. Within the police, corruption is especially widespread within the customs sector, and there have been allegations that Customs Officers and Border Guards sometimes conspire with smuggling rings. As one Latvian MP noted "the only thing that is organized and evolved in the transition period is organized crime".

**Money laundering:** In the 2005 International Narcotics Control Strategy Report; Major Money Laundering Countries, Latvia is listed as a country of primary concern. Latvia is highly sensitive to money laundering, as it is a regional financial centre, and has a large number of commercial banks. Organized crime accounts for a sizeable portion of money laundered in Latvia, both local and international. For example, two Latvian banks were closed down in the U.S. on suspicions of money laundering.

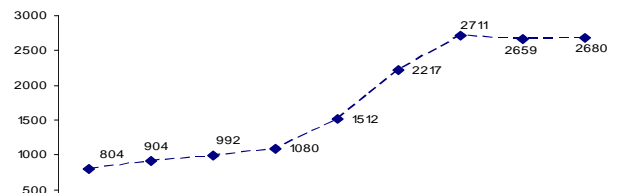
This fact sheet was prepared by Maja Edfast, based on information and databases available at the Silk Road Studies Program, Uppsala University, [www.silkroadstudies.org](http://www.silkroadstudies.org)



Seizures: Heroin and Amphetamine Type Stimulants



Registered Drug Users



## Counter-Narcotics Efforts

### State

Following the independence from the Soviet Union, the Latvian state structure was weak, and there was little legislation and control mechanisms related to the drug issue. In 1992 a major Latvian pharmaceutical company manufactured and attempted to distribute 3500 kg of the drug Methamphetamine, and in the aftermath of this scandal, the government created several mechanisms for combating drug manufacturing, trafficking and abuse. These included the Coordinating Commission for Narcotics Control and Combating Drug Addiction, the National Narcotics Treatment and Prevention Centre, the Narcotics Control Committee and the Narcotics Combating Bureau. In 1998 the first Latvian counter narcotics 5 year plan, the Latvian Drug Control and Drug Abuse Prevention Strategy, was created with the assistance of UN Drug Control Program (UNDCP). It contained far reaching aims and objectives, including prevention and rehabilitation, as well as control of illicit trafficking (including provisions on the prevention of money laundering) and a stricter control on licit drugs. The plan was amended in 2004, when the Narcotics Coordination Bureau, headed by the Prime minister, with the purpose of supervising Latvian law enforcement in the area, was created. In 2003 the Latvian Anti Corruption Bureau was established, and during the last years there have been a number of high profile court cases related to corruption within the police. Latvia has officially been very active in combating corruption, and has sought World Bank's assistance for the development of its anti-corruption policy. In addition to this, Latvia's EU accession process meant both pressure and financial support in relation to anti-corruption policies. Despite this, lack of funding and coordination in anti-corruption mechanisms remains a problem.

### Civil Society

In Latvia, there is a liberal attitude amongst youth towards drugs, and an increasing dependence on alcohol and illicit drugs amongst the adolescence. In response to this, there are both governmental programs and several NGOs working with youth and dependency prevention. However, this work is hampered by the low political and organizational activity of the school youth in Latvia today. Some non-governmental organizations provide support to

parents, and there are several non-governmental telephone hotlines that provides assistance to drug users and their relatives. Programmes for the prevention of drug abuse are also formulated by local governments.

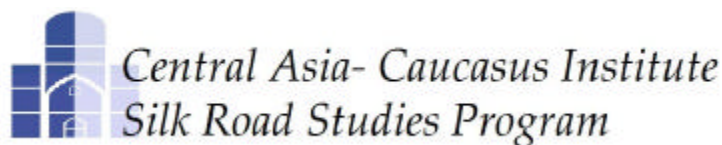
### Regional Cooperation

The extensive regional cooperation between the Baltic republics is defined in the 1997 document Fight against Drugs. In addition to this Latvia cooperates with the police forces in the Baltic Sea region in the "Task force" project, and has several drug related bilateral agreements with countries in the area (including Sweden and Norway).

### International

Latvia is a party to the 1988 UN Drug Convention, the 1971 UN convention on Psychotropic Substances, the 1961 UN Single Convention as amended by its 1972 protocol and the UN Convention against Transnational Organized crime. Latvia has participated in several projects of the UN Drug Control Program (UNDCP), as well as several EU related projects pre-accession. As a member of the European Union, Latvia participates in the Union's programs against drug use and trafficking, as well as in the information and monitoring programs. In addition to this, Latvia cooperates with the U.S. within programs concerning investigating and prosecuting drug offences, corruption and organized crime and educational programs for law enforcement personnel.

The Government of Latvia (GoL) criminalized money laundering for all serious crimes in 1998, ratifying the council of Europe's Convention on Laundering, Search, Seizure and Confiscation of Proceeds from Crime. Latvia's Financial Intelligence Unit is a member of the Egmont group since 1999 and has signed multilateral agreements with 10 accession countries for automatically exchanging information between EU financial intelligence units through the FIU.NET.



Joint Transatlantic Research and Policy Center

### The Project on Narcotics, Organized Crime and Security in Eurasia

The Project on Narcotics, Organized Crime and Security in Eurasia is conducted by the Central Asia-Caucasus Institute and Silk Road Studies Program. The Central Asia-Caucasus Institute and Silk Road Studies Program form a Joint Transatlantic Research and Policy Center affiliated with the School of Advanced International Studies, Johns Hopkins University, Washington DC; and the Departments of East European Studies and Peace and Conflict Research, Uppsala University, Sweden.

#### Latest publications:

Niklas L.P. Swanström, "Multilateralism and Narcotics control in Central Asia", *CEF Quarterly*, the journal of the China-Eurasia Forum, February 2005.

Niklas L. P. Swanström and Maral Madi, "International Cooperation Against Drug Trafficking, in Central Asia," *United Nations: Multilateralism and International Security*, in C. Uday Bhaskar et. al., eds, Institute for Defense Studies and Analyses & SHIPRA Publications, 2005.

Svante E. Cornell, "Stemming the Contagion: Regional Efforts to Curb Afghan Heroin's Impact", *Georgetown Journal of International Affairs*, vol. 6 no. 1, Winter/Spring 2005.

Kairat Osmonaliev, *Developing Counter-Narcotics Policy in Central Asia: Legal and Political Dimensions*, Silk Road Paper, January 2005.

Svante E. Cornell, *Narcotics, Radicalism and Security in Central Asia: The Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan*, East European Studies Working Paper no. 84, December, 2004.

Maral Madi, "Drug Trade in Kyrgyzstan: Structure, Implications and Countermeasures", *Central Asian Survey*, Vol 23, No 3-4, December, 2004.

#### Database:

The current version of the database contains information on illegal drugs and related issues in Central Eurasia (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan), Russia and the Golden Crescent (Afghanistan, Iran, Pakistan). These countries are the primary focus at Silk Road Studies. The database can be accessed at [www.silkroadstudies.org/drugsdatabase.htm](http://www.silkroadstudies.org/drugsdatabase.htm)

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