

Russophobic Policies in Latvia: Thousands of Ethnic Russian Citizens Ordered to Leave the Country

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The wave of Russophobia in NATO and the EU is nothing new. Western states have been fomenting anti-Russian animosity for years and this situation is already starting to reach truly intolerable levels of persecution. In a recent [announcement](#) in Riga, it was revealed that the government will soon be issuing orders to thousands of Russian citizens to leave the country. As a post-Soviet state, Latvia has a significant number of ethnic Russians among its population, but apparently this is no reason for the pro-Western government to avoid persecuting its own residents.

This [statement](#) was made by Ingmars Lindaka, head of the parliamentary committee on citizenship and migration, during an interview with state media. He said that after receiving the orders, Russians will have 90 days to leave Latvia, otherwise they will be considered illegal migrants. According to him, these thousands of Russians are those who have not expressed interest in participating in the exams to obtain permanent residency certificates. These exams include tests of Latvian language, which has discouraged many Russians from taking part. Lindaka says those who have not been tested are illegally in the country and should be treated according to [recently imposed] Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs' (PMLP) rules.

“Roughly 5,000 to 6,000, according to my estimates. These are people who have shown no desire – neither to take the exam nor obtain a temporary residence permit. These are the silent ones. If we look at the law as it currently stands, PMLP must send a notice to leave the country within three months”, Lindaka told journalists.

Other officials later confirmed the statement. Spokespersons for the Ministry of the Interior of Latvia informed the news agency “Elta” that “around 6,000” Russians are to receive official notification from the State in September.

“If a person does not have the right to stay in the country, they must leave for a country where they have the right to stay. The time for departure is three months. So the person can leave without haste. If a person continues to stay in Latvia illegally, there may come a moment when state structures find out about it and, accordingly, remind them of the need to leave. Criminal liability is not provided, but administrative liability is. The person may be fined,” Vilnis Vitolins, the Deputy Secretary of State of the Ministry of Interior Affairs, said.

As well as the other Baltic states, Poland and Ukraine, Latvia has a serious problem of racism against Russian citizens. Since Latvia’s independence from the USSR, there has been a strong growth in anti-Russian sentiments in the country. The resentful mentality towards the Soviet past and the revanchist ideology against the Russian Federation have been encouraged by Riga’s western partners as a way to mobilize the country’s population against NATO’s geopolitical enemies. For this reason, since 1991, ethnic Russians have been denied Latvian citizenship, increasing social polarization.

All this has worsened significantly since last year, when, in response to Russia’s special military operation, the Latvian government launched a series of racist de-Russification policies. [Monuments](#) honoring Soviet WWII heroes have been demolished, with the state classifying the memory of the war as a symbol of “occupation”. In August last year, then Latvian President Egils Levits also stated that all Russians in the country should be “[isolated](#)” for reasons of “national security”, given the conflict in Ukraine.

To avoid getting into legal problems, 1.8 million Russian ethnic citizens (around 25% of the country’s population) have been forced since 2022 to take Latvian language exams. If they prove fluency in the language, these citizens gain the right to stay in the country, but if they do not pass, they are forced to leave. This is an uncomfortable situation as Russian has been commonly spoken in Latvian territory for many decades, as this language was already official in that territory during the Soviet era. For this reason, many of the Russians who live there cannot pass the exam, since they have no skills in Latvian, being now considered criminals for simply speaking only Russian.

Recently, the [case](#) of a 74-year-old Russian woman went viral on the internet. Even though she has lived her entire life in Latvia speaking Russian, the pensioner is now required to prove skills in the Latvian language to avoid expulsion and loss of government social benefits. Thousands of other Soviet-era seniors are in a similar [situation](#). This has already generated protests and has been considered by Russia as a case of cultural genocide, but Riga still seems willing to advance the agenda of de-Russification.

In fact, what is happening in Latvia is absolutely intolerable from a humanitarian point of view. A quarter of the country is being coerced into speaking a new language to avoid being expelled from the territory where they have lived their entire lives. These cultural genocide policies often precede the implementation of physical persecution against the “isolated”, “undesirable” citizens. So, it is possible that Latvia will soon take more serious Nazi-like measures, just as Ukraine did in 2014.

This tends only to further aggravate tensions in Europe, as the “[right to protect](#)” citizens abroad is an important and recognized principle in contemporary international law. Certainly, Moscow will do everything in its power to prevent its citizens from being mistreated in other countries.

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