



EGP fact-finding mission to Latvia - Report

Context

During the 2019 European Parliamentary election campaign in Latvia the European Green Party and the extended European Green political family expressed endorsement to the Latvian political party *Progresīvie* and its candidates. The European Green family's common support was also expressed through a campaign [visit by GroenLinks MEP Judith Sargentini to Riga](#) in May 2019. Since then several exchanges were made between the members of *Progresīvie* and EGP both through attending EGP Councils either physically or online and through FYEG having a full member organisation from Latvia whose membership overlaps with that of *Progresīvie*. EGP also endorsed *Progresīvie* in the 2020 campaign for the Riga city council.

On 27 December 2021 *Progresīvie* informed EGP's Secretariat via e-mail about their intention to become a Candidate Member of the European Green Party. The European Green Party's Committee made the unanimous decision to proceed with the application after thorough considerations. The application is due to be voted upon by the delegates to the 35th Council of the European Green Party to be held between 3-5 June 2022 in Riga, Latvia.

As a next step a fact-finding mission was organised to Riga, Latvia on 14-15-16 March 2022 with the participation of EGP co-chair Thomas Waitz, EGP Secretary General Mar Garcia and EGP Committee members responsible for the Baltic region Jean Lambert and Oras Tynkkynen.

The present report summarises the findings of the fact-finding mission.

Short history of the party

Progresīvie is a new and growing political party in Latvia that stands for social justice, the Green New Deal, gender equality, social rights, and a proactive role for the state in the economy.

The party is a successor of a social-democratic NGO of the same name that was founded on 26 March 2011. The party itself was founded on 25 February 2017. Since 4 September 2021 its leaders have been Antoņina Ņenaševa and Atis Švinka.

The party participated in the 2017 municipal elections in four municipalities and won seats in two of them. Its first national election participation took place in 2018 where *Progresīvie* had a unique gender parity principle on their ballots, with all election list leaders being women. Prior to the election, the party declined to join an alliance with centre and right-wing liberal parties arguing that it would compromise the party's left-wing credentials and high standard

for political donations. The party did not win any seats, receiving 2.61% of the vote which did, however, qualify them for state funding in the future.

In 2019 *Progresīvie* participated in the European Parliament election. They ran with the slogan "More Europe" on a federalist platform, with their main proposals concerning social policy and Green politics. They ultimately received 2.9% of the vote and thus did not get any seats at the European Parliament.

In early 2020, the Riga City Council was dismissed, and a snap election was called. Due to technicalities and the COVID-19 pandemic, the election was postponed until 29 August 2020. *Progresīvie* formed a common electoral list with the liberal *Development/For!* alliance claiming that ideological differences are not as important at the local level and stressed the importance of toppling Riga's ruling *Social Democratic Party Harmony – Honour to serve Riga* coalition that had been involved in multiple corruption scandals. The common electoral list won the election with 18 out of 60 seats, of which nine were members of *Progresīvie* and 2 were independent city activists with ties to *Progresīvie*.

Progresīvie has high hopes for the October 2022 national parliamentary elections as the party has grown significantly over the years attracting more popular support. As part of its institution-building exercise, it has created a platform for professionals and experts to foster mutual intellectual exchange and develop meaningful policy proposals. The party aims to lead the country toward a sustainable, just and inclusive future by promoting and building grassroots engagement while striving for national representation in order to effect systemic change already now.

Short overview of the political situation in the country

- Unitary parliamentary republic with unicameral parliament
- Population: 1.9 million
 - 63% Latvians
 - 25% Russians
 - 3% Belarusians
 - 2% Ukrainians
- NATO and EU member (since 2004)
- Eurozone member (since 2014)
- The country's estimated nominal GDP for 2021 was 38 billion USD and 63 billion USD taking purchasing power parity into account. It ranks 43rd in the world in terms of nominal GDP per capita, and 47th when taking PPP into account. It has a service sector dominated economy (74%), with industry playing a relevant role (22%).
- According to Eurostat in 2019 27.3% of the population was at risk of poverty or social exclusion. This has most likely increased with the COVID-19 related financial hardships.
- *Transparency International's* [Corruption Perception Index](#) for 2021 ranks Latvia as 36th out of 180 countries in the world achieving 59/100 points. The EU average here

is 64/100, placing Latvia 15th out of 27 EU countries. The OECD average is 67/100, ranking Latvia 26th out of 37 countries (28th in 2020).

- *Freedom House's* [Freedom in the World report for 2021](#) designates Latvia as “free”, giving it a total score of 89 (37/40 in political rights and 52/60 in civil liberties). For comparison Finland, which has the highest score alongside Sweden and Norway, received 100 points (40/40 in political rights and 60/60 in civil liberties). Latvia lost some points ([see here](#)) in “minority rights” (due to 200.000 stateless Russians living in the country who cannot vote, hold public office, or establish political parties), “safeguards against corruption”, “government transparency”, “media freedom”, “academic freedom”, “marriage equality” and in several areas relating to the judicial system.
- *Reporters Without Borders's* [2021 World Press Freedom Index](#) ranks Latvia as 22nd out of 180 countries, giving it a score of 19.26 (the lower score is the better here). For comparison, the 1st place Norway has a score of 6.72, and 2nd place Finland has a score of 6.99. In Latvia's case the [country specific report](#) criticises that pro-Kremlin media has been sanctioned in the country.

Politics

- Currently the country is led by a centre-right four-party government composed of:
 - *New Conservative Party - JKP* (-)
 - *Development/For!* coalition (ALDE)
 - *National Alliance* (ECR)
 - *New Unity* (EPP)
 - Executive Vice President of the European Commission for An Economy that Works for People & Commissioner for Trade, Valdis Dombrovskis, comes from this party
 - This party also gives the Prime Minister Arturs Krišjānis Kariņš
- There are two opposition parties in the parliament:
 - *Harmony* (PES)
 - *Union of Greens and Farmers* (-)
- The last three national elections (2011, 2014, 2018) were all won by *Harmony* (PES), but because this social democratic party is seen as close to the Russian government and Russian political interests, a cordon sanitaire of other parties has kept it out of government.
- The next general election is scheduled for October 2022
- The political discourse in the country is currently dominated by Vladimir Putin's war against Ukraine. A relatively high number of refugees are arriving to the country, and while the linguistic division among the population is reflected in different understandings of the motivations for the war, the political spectrum represented in the national parliament is united in their support for Ukraine.

European Parliament

- The country elects 8 MEPs with a 5% national threshold.
- Currently it has 2 EPP, 2 S&D, 2 ECR, 1 Renew and 1 non-attached MEPs.
- One of the Latvian MEPs, Tatjana Ždanoka, who until 1 April 2022 was sitting with the Greens/EFA Group, and who is representing the *Latvian Russian Union*, has a negative reputation in all three Baltic states due to the stances the MEP expressed in the past and keeps representing in the European Parliament with regards to the regime of the President of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin. After being the only MEP from the Greens/EFA Group to vote against an EP resolution condemning the Russian President's actions in Ukraine following 24 February 2022 *Progresīvie* together with EGP requested a separation between the MEP and the Greens/EFA Group which was realised on 1 April 2022.

Main political values in programme

Progresīvie presented the framework for the party's upcoming electoral manifesto for the 2022 general elections at the party's congress on 2 April 2022.

The framework is divided into seven parts: social security, healthcare, a strong state, an inclusive state, energy, economic development and education.

In the area of social security, the party is committed to strengthening the foundations of the welfare state in order to restore public confidence in state institutions and democracy and to reduce vulnerability to populist threats and Russian propaganda messages.

In the area of health, the party is committed to investing early in public health and disease prevention, which the party says will lead to multiplier benefits through longer healthy life expectancy, greater well-being and the ability to reach full potential in the workplace.

The framework further states that the core values of *Progresīvie's* foreign policy are security and peace, human dignity, justice and responsibility towards future generations. The party states that freedom implies responsibility and they are therefore committed to the defence of the country, ensuring all necessary investments in defence programmes at national, regional and European level.

The party also believes that only a cohesive society is a strong society, one in which every individual feels secure, accepted and able to realise their life goals. That is why the party stands up for respect for human rights, especially for the most vulnerable.

In the field of energy *Progresīvie* believes that Europe's Green course should be used in Latvia's strategic interests and it should not be unnecessarily hampered by petty objections. The party believes that the country can ensure its energy independence from Russia through investment. Latvia is also one of the few countries in the world that does not extract any kind

of fossil resources, so a sound climate policy is also the basis for Latvia's security and modern economic development.

Progresīvie plans to offer its voters a new model aimed at achieving high productivity, high wages and a high value-added economy that at the same time meets the planet's ecological limits and reduces income and wealth inequalities in society.

The party also believes that Latvia's mission is to provide excellent education for everyone. This is to be achieved by making education and science a political priority on the common path towards an independent, prosperous society. *Progresīvie* points out that quality education and, consequently, an educated society capable of critical thinking, also mean guarantees for national security.

Although the party has no statutory stipulation to apply gender balance principles in party structures, the majority of *Progresīvie*'s Riga city councillors are women, as well as 4 out of 9 of the current board members with gender parity being applied for the positions of co-chairs.

Originally, the party was considering alliance options with both the *Party of European Socialists* and the *European Green Party*. After a lengthy and democratic deliberative process the party's membership decided to endorse seeking membership within EGP.

Existence of youth wing

The youth organisation [Protests](#) signed a cooperation agreement with *Progresīvie* in February 2022. The agreement states that the two organisations will be able to organise events, campaigns and other activities together that will contribute to achieving their common goals. Members of *Protests* who have also joined *Progresīvie* will be able to act as representatives of both organisations within *Progresīvie*'s party structures and *Protests* will be representing young people in *Progresīvie* towards third party initiatives. At the same time, the independence of both organisations is maintained, with neither party having veto power over the actions of the other.

Protests is a full member of the Federation of Young European Greens, EGP's official youth wing, and a partner organisation of Cooperation and Development Network Eastern Europe, FYEG's sister organisation in Eastern Europe. CDN currently has two board members from *Protests*.

List of organised meetings during the fact-finding mission

- Agnija Birule, Advocacy and Project Manager, [Delna](#) (Transparency International Latvia)
- Christian Heldt, [German Ambassador to Latvia](#)
- [Ivo Leitans](#), journalist at the national television of Latvia
- Iluta Lāce, chairperson, [Marta Centre](#)

- Mārtiņš Zemītis, Deputy Head of [European Commission representation to Latvia](#)
- Ruth Rajavejjabhisal, Deputy Head of Mission at the [British Embassy in Riga](#)
- Elmārs Sveķis, Head of Political, Press and Public Affairs at the [British Embassy in Riga](#)
- Jānis Brizga, chair of [Green Liberty](#)
- Jānis Ulme, chair of the board of Friends of the Earth Latvia
- Several [Progresīvie](#) members of the Riga city council
- Several members of [Progresīvie](#)'s board
- Two members of the expert forum formed around [Progresīvie](#)
- Several members of the youth organisation [Protests](#)
- Kaspars Zālītis, Member of the board, [Mozaīka](#)

Meetings with NGOs

From talking to several civil society stakeholders (listed above) during EGP's fact-finding mission to Latvia EGP's delegation learned the following:

- The interviewed stakeholders were not surprised by *Progresīvie* being the political actor that is the subject of EGP's visit as their values lie closest to those of the European Greens from the Latvian political landscape.
- The membership of environmental, LGBTIQ+ and women's rights NGOs overlap with that of *Progresīvie*. Several people excused themselves from meeting with EGP's delegation or made a disclaimer at the beginning of our meetings due to the fact that they are themselves supporters or members of the party (this is despite EGP contacting each stakeholder individually through their official channels of communication). Even some institutional actors signalled their support towards the party. EGP's delegation noted this as a positive sign.
- As *Progresīvie* is not represented in the Latvian parliament at the moment the organisations that work on advocacy towards policy changes noted that they cooperate with the party only on policy development basis for the time being. Nevertheless the interviewed stakeholders were positive that once elected to parliament, members of *Progresīvie* would be allies in furthering progressive public policy goals.
- Several stakeholders noted positive shifts in the steering of the Riga city government since the 2020 Riga council elections despite the challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic. These positive changes were in the fields of local government transparency, efficiency and accountability, objective and metric based evaluation of subsidy allocation, deconstruction of informal power and lobby networks in the city government and endeavours in the fields of social and environmental policies (housing, pedestrian focused city planning, waste management, increasing Green areas).
- Multiple stakeholders positively highlighted *Progresīvie*'s efforts to bridge the ethnic gap in the Latvian electorate between Latvian speakers and Russian speakers.



- One stakeholder highlighted the potential of *Progresīvie* to pool voters from several other political actors in Latvia due to their social democratic, Green, multicultural, anti-graft and human rights focused profile. This stakeholder, however, also noted this profile as a potential difficulty in branching out to the Latvian countryside.

Note: Notes taken during the interviews with stakeholders are available upon request.

Conclusions and recommendations

Conclusions

EGP's past exchanges with *Progresīvie*, combined with the fact-finding mission's experiences developed a positive, dynamic, youthful and professional image of *Progresīvie* in the Committee of the European Greens. The party's values, as also represented by its past leading candidates, current leadership, elected representatives and structures, overlap with the mainstream Green political ideas on feminism, LGBT rights, social and economic justice, strengthening democracy and democratic participation, climate change mitigation and environmental protection.

The party is currently on an upwards trajectory with small but significant electoral steps. This is aided by the current funding the party receives from the Latvian state and from its members through membership fees, by grassroots organisation building and by the inclusion of an expert forum in the orbit of the party.

The party's efforts to bridge the ethnic gap in the Latvian electorate coupled with their left wing economic policies countering the mainstream of the Latvian political spectrum give *Progresīvie* a unique position to channel citizen support to their cause from a multitude of electoral groups. Furthermore, the party's alliance with the FFF community in the country through their associated youth organisation gives them potential amongst the first time voters as well.

Although not yet represented in parliament, *Progresīvie* managed to foster its competent and professional image through their constructive and compromise searching work with sometimes difficult partners in the Riga city government by steering the capital city in a positive direction during economically and epidemically challenging times.

Recommendation

The Committee of the European Green Party believes that *Progresīvie* meets EGP's Candidate Membership criteria.

The Committee of the European Green Party further notes that it currently does not have a member party from Latvia and that one of the currently agreed strategic aims of the EGP is



to strengthen Green representation in Central Eastern Europe as well as to strengthen the perspective of representatives from this region within the Green family.

Considering all the above, the EGP Committee recommends to the delegates of the 35th EGP Council to accept *Progresīvie* as a Candidate Member.