

"From the heart of Latvia"

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By now Putin Russia's foreign policy should be clear to all. Implementing its Diaspora policy, Russia is ready to protect *compatriots* everywhere, unifying them by force if necessary, into a single *Russian world* within Soviet, or even Tsarist Empire borders, into a new *Eurasian Union*, making Russia once again a world power.

The definition of *Compatriots* is not clear, but includes former Soviet citizens, not only ethnic Russians. Russia heard *Compatriot* cries for help before annexing Crimea and now is using the same strategy in eastern Ukraine. It was successful in Crimea but not so in eastern Ukraine. Without Ukraine the *Eurasian Union* is a non-starter.

To absorb Latvia into the *Russian world* Putin's approach is different. Not wanting to repeat the legal and military problems of invasion and annexation of 1940, Russia wants to achieve the same result with the help of ethnic Latvian voters in a seemingly democratic election. Russia's foreign policy executor in Latvia, the Harmony Centre party (SC), now *Harmony*, has already declared it will, with coalition partners, be able to form a government after the parliamentary elections in October 2014. Possible partners are Ždanoka's Latvian Russian Union (Latvijas krievu savienība), Lemberg's Farmers Union (ZZS), and Šlesers United Latvia (Vienoti Latvijai).

Potential Harmony partner parties and their leaders are politically active and their party platforms well known. They are unlikely to attract new Latvian voters to a Harmony lead coalition. Different tactics are necessary. Šlesers recruited several former political heavyweights (Kalvītis, Godmanis, Straume, Zalans) with high name recognition into the UL. Harmony is "Latvianizing" its party, also recruiting well-known politicians (Krišjāns Peters, Kārlis Leiškalns), former ministers and other party MP's as star candidates. But to gain 50%+1 MP's in the Saeima and attract ethnic Latvian voters a new Latvian party offering something they want but aren't getting is the real answer.

On May 5th, 2014 such a political party was founded. *From the heart of Latvia* (No sirds Latvijai-NSL) elected Inguna Sudraba as party chair. As a former State Auditor, she has a reputation of fairness, reason, and responsibility. The new party is trying to be responsive to Latvian voters who want an honest and corruption free government, and who traditionally vote for center-right Latvian parties, or are disillusioned with politics and no longer vote.

The NSL party platform concerns itself with children and families, promotes co-operative structures in business, wants a fair pension system and the elimination of what it sees as unfair tax policies. Sudraba stresses the need for a long-term national strategic development plan, an easily understood state budget created "from scratch", and an equivalent level of mastery of Latvian in both Latvian and Russian primary schools. She promises to create a meritocratic bureaucracy, promoting qualified and competent officials into high positions, with clearly defined responsibilities and adopt decision making at the lowest possible levels.

The President ought to be elected directly by the people, serving as a symbol of national unity, promoting public confidence and reducing political divisions. This idea is also supported by the *Harmony*, *Latvian Development*, and *Regional Alliance* parties. Changes are also promised in the election act so people can vote for an individual rather than a party.

Sudraba's historical assessment is severe. She strongly criticizes the parties in government for the past twenty years, who stand out in their lust for power, arrogance, incompetence, greed, and who see themselves above the needs of the country. She claims this is reflected in Latvia's poverty and society's disbelief in the future. The so called Latvian "success story" is written by the cynical hypocrisy of power, exposed the lies and unfulfilled promises. The nation has lost any hope of progress, equality, or prosperity. Since 2008, drastic belt-tightening at the expense of the people cannot be called a Latvian success. The government today provides only one belief: voters will never be able to repay the government acquired national debt. The old economic system has made all, including children and grandchildren the eternal servants of large corporate financial systems.

Sudraba's historical vision is emotional, neither rational nor analytical. Unfortunately, however, many Latvians would agree with Sudraba's historical vision and party platform.

Sudraba's reasons for this state of affairs are opaque. She sees "alien ideology spreading ever wider throughout Latvia," not identifying the "alien ideology" or its source. She sees the European Union as a major threat: "We will not tolerate the further erosion of Latvian internal and external sovereignty as a result of EU federalization and function centralization" thus indirectly saying that Western thought and institutions are harmful to Latvia. By implication, she is saying Latvia's 'home' ideology is non-Western, perhaps Soviet-era thinking. She does not criticize Russian soft power and institutional activity in Latvia. Unfortunately, a significant number of elderly and middle aged Latvians think in these terms. The Western rational approach to life seems foreign to many. It's dry and has no 'heart'.

The party's name and slogan *The heart of Latvia* is an appeal to emotions, the heart, rather than the mind. It says, don't analyze, react emotionally. The slogan confirms and reassures those who share thoughts, feelings and suspicions similar to those of the NSL.

Will *The heart of Latvia's* emotional appeal pay off at election time? Latvian facts, a pollster, in an April survey indicated Sudraba's NSL electoral support at 2.8%; in July it climbed to over 3%. Recent reports tie the party to undisclosed financial sources and questionable supporters.

Even if the NSL does not exceed 5%, historically small parties (less than 5% of the vote) obtain between 13-16% of the vote. Depending on their number, they can fragment the Latvian electorate sufficiently to give Harmony the opportunity to govern after the 12th parliamentary elections in October.