

INTERVIEW: *Tatjana Ždanoka*

# NATO Makes War on the Political Front

*Tatjana Ždanoka was a Member of the European Parliament for 20 years, from 2004 to 2024. During her mandates, she has fought for the rights of nine million Russian-speaking minorities in the European Union, first of all in her country, Latvia, and in the other two Baltic republics, threatened by nationalistic regimes in those countries. After the Russian Special Military Operation in Ukraine began, repression of those minorities intensified and their representatives were persecuted. Ultimately, Ždanoka was deprived of her passive electoral rights and could not run again for the European Parliament. In 2024 she was accused of carrying out actions in the interests of the Russian Federation. She is currently living in Brussels and would be arrested should she return to Latvia.*

*Claudio Celani interviewed her for Neue Solidarität (NS) in October 2024. The interview is published in EIR with permission.*

**NS:** Tatjana, tell us about your political activity in the European Parliament.

**Ždanoka:** I stood up for the interests of Russian-speaking minorities in the European Parliament during four parliamentary terms. The name of the party from which I was elected in 2004 was “For Human Rights in United Latvia.” At that time, there was a hope that Latvia would follow the recommendations of international organizations in the field of human rights and become [a] united country. The European Parliament, in the 11th of March 2004 resolution, on the state of preparedness for EU membership of 10 countries, [said that it]—

encourages the Latvian authorities to overcome the existing split in society and to favor the genuine integration of “non-citizens,” ensuring an



European Parliament Multimedia Centre  
*Tatjana Ždanoka, fighter for the rights of Russian-speaking minorities in the European Union.*

equal competitive chance in education and labor ... recommends that the Latvian authorities quickly ratify the Council of Europe’s Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities.

In fact, Latvia has joined the EU bearing ... 450,000 people deprived of citizenship (20% of population), and realizing the program of elimination of secondary education in minority languages. The second country which has the similar category of “non-citizens” is the neighboring Estonia. These

people had migrated to [the] Baltics from other Soviet republics as a labor force after the end of World War II. But [the] essential part of [the] nowadays-minority population—mostly ethnic Russians, Byelorussians, Poles, Jews—were living on these territories for centuries.

**NS:** Did the Latvian government follow those recommendations?

**Ždanoka:** Now, after 20 years, we can say that Latvia has not implemented the EP [European Parliament—ed.] official recommendations. Although the Framework Convention was ratified, all of its provisions are being ignored. The current legislation looks like Latvia is a monolingual country, despite the fact that it was never like this.

Just one example to illustrate the situation: Latvia’s official informative portal for foreigners gives no information on ethnic and linguistic composition of the population of Latvia. The idea that Latvia was never a monoethnic country can appear only via the names of worldwide known Latvians: Sergei Eisenstein, Mark Rothko, Mikhail Baryshnikov, Uljana Semjonova, Sergei Žoltok.

In what concerns languages, readers should be very surprised at the impressive figure, that 96% of our in-

habitants speak at least two languages. Latvia's official informative portal for foreigners does not explain [to] them that we are, in fact, a bilingual country where one-third of the people use Russian at home.

### **Victims of Confrontation with Russia**

**NS:** Why did the EU ignore the problem of minority rights in Latvia?

**Ždanoka:** My answer is that the EU institutions are seemingly more interested in geopolitical considerations than in the core values and principles on which the European Union is based. The problems of native Russian speakers were treated by the EU mostly from the point of view of competing with Russia for influence in the Baltic region.

**NS:** What has been the attitude of the media?

**Ždanoka:** After the events of 2014 in Ukraine, Western media began to present similar scenarios to come in three Baltic States—Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. I need only recall the infamous “Latvia invasion” BBC film that premiered in 2016 under the title *World War Three: Inside the War Room*.

Recently, we were even told the timing and exact location. According to the research analyst Vasily Gatov at the Massachusetts-based company FilterLabs, who is quoted in the *Daily Beast* article of Aug. 30, 2024, the—

speculations, processed by pro-Russian powers in the Baltic States, are turned into Russia's alleged plans to attack the Estonian city of Narva on a certain date in November 2024.

It is interesting that, in the opinion of this “analyst,” all this will happen on the initiative of some “pro-Russian powers.” Note that with such powers he assumes native Russian-speakers living in the Baltics. Another “analyst” quoted in this article, Pavel Marinich, a Byelorussian politician actually residing in Vilnius [Lithuania—ed.], gives a derogatory description of these people:

There are quite a few so-called *vatniki* in Lithuania, who had worked for Soviet factories; and although there is no Russian television here, they watch Russian propaganda on YouTube and on Telegram social media.

**NS:** Who are the *vatniki*?

**Ždanoka:** The Russian word *vatniki* means the simple but warm workwear, predecessor of the quilted coats and jackets that all of Europe is now wearing. This word was originally invented as a pejorative name for Russian-speakers in Ukraine, and then the geographical use of the word has expanded.

But in fact, no propaganda is needed to indoctrinate these people in what they experience on a daily basis: a derogatory attitude by the ruling elite of three Baltic States towards their culture, language, historical memory. Such an attitude came up, especially during the last 10 years, with a policy of *exclusion*.

### **Minority Rights Become a Crime**

**NS:** Tell us about the legal attack on you.

**Ždanoka:** When a problem is not going to be solved, they silence those who bring it up. In the middle of July 2024, two days after my MEP [Member of the European Parliament—ed.] mandate ceased to be in force, the State Security service of Latvia brought against me the official accusation of committing crime.

By this action, the named service is now absorbed in the criminal prosecution of, not only journalists, students, civil society activists, but also a former member of the European Parliament—for allegedly committing crimes against the state.

These alleged crimes are the ones added to the Criminal Law over the past 12 years. Their vague wording allows for very broad interpretation and selective application. For example, the State Security Service does not like my work on the consolidation and self-organization of the community of Russian-speakers in Latvia. Another alleged crime: telling people in Russia about [the] situation of their compatriots living in Latvia. Altogether, these—my activities—may, by the opinion of the Service, assist Russia in action directed against the Republic of Latvia.

I am ready to prove that all accusations are completely unfounded. Fighting for fulfillment of state obligations before the minorities; for decent education for all children; and a respectful attitude towards all the elderly, is not a crime against the Latvian state.

**NS:** Where is, in all this, the famous European commitment to human rights?

**Ždanoka:** Here we face the problem concerning the notion “rule of law.” In fact, there was a substitution of

concepts: Instead of human rights, the EU began to speak mostly about the “rule of law.” It is interesting to analyze, from that point of view, the [statement of the President of Latvia](#), Edgars Rinkēvičs, at the 79th Session of the United Nations General Assembly on Sept. 24, 2024. His multiple references to the “rules-based order” and the “rule of law” overshadowed the references to human rights (violated by some foreign countries only).

But if on the international arena our ruling politicians still inertially recall old notions, at home they have been thrown out of the lexicon altogether—since speaking about the law and especially about application of the law is much more comfortable than to address human beings and their rights.

There’s a well-known saying in our area: “Our law is like a horse. The way you ride it, that way it goes.” In fact, our President is riding mostly those who speak on behalf of the law—the judges.

**NS:** Baltic representatives have been given the most powerful jobs in the new European Commission. They run foreign and security policy, defense, and economy. It looks like a reward for being trusted followers of the EU-NATO agenda.

**Ždanoka:** In a number of his public speeches this year, the President of Latvia, [Edgar Rinkēvičs](#), [pointed to](#) the following unresolved problems: insufficient security capabilities, tolerant courts, and the fight against propaganda. It is worth noting that the President did not find controversial, his address to the persons politically repressed in the territory of [what is now] Latvia, in the middle of the last century. Here is the extract of this speech published in the official President’s portal:

We have a lot of jobs that are being done with allies.... Our friends are getting more here, but we also have a lot of tasks and homework to do.... Our courts are still very lenient on those criminals who should be tried harder, harsher, especially for crimes committed against national security and independence.

## Criminalization of Views and Speech

**NS:** Whom does he mean by “criminals”?

**Ždanoka:** Here’s a character profile of these terrible criminals whom the President (followed by the Prosecutor General) proposes to judge more harshly.

On July 10, 2024, the Riga Court sentenced Jelena Kreile to three years imprisonment under the section of the Criminal Law on committing public glorification of genocide, crimes against humanity, crimes against peace or war crimes.

The court found the installation of the colors of the Russian tricolor [flag] in her flat window to be a justification of aggression, war crimes, and crimes against humanity. In the picture one can see Jelena and her installation. She is using, as the elements, the small flags of both Russia and Latvia, as well as of some other countries. The window looks out into the courtyard behind the old wooden house.

The extremely popular Latvian language platform [www.pietiek.com](#) [posted] the [essay on the case](#), written by another political prisoner, Vladimir Linderman. The author concludes:

For any impartial viewer, it is obvious: Both the said Kreile’s installation and others contain a simple message—like in the movies about the cat Leopold—let’s live amicably! Or, to put it in a more academic spirit: Kreile advocates good neighborly relations between Latvia and Russia. One can ironize for her political naïvety, but naïvety is not a crime.

**NS:** Coming back to the so-called Russian threat towards the Baltic States, what would you say to those who, in their publications, describe the Russian-speakers in the Baltic States as a threat?

**Ždanoka:** I would tell them: My life experience says that if a minority claims to be discriminated against, one should never believe the majority that rejects that accusation. It is necessary to get to the root of the problem and eliminate it, rather than trying to cover up the plant that grows from that root.