

LATVIA

Timeline – Women Rights in Europe

- 1920 – women granted rights to vote in parliamentary elections in Latvia
- 1920 – first elected women - MP
- 1999 – Vaira Vīķe – Freiberga the first female president of Latvia was elected

Important female figures of country

Vaira Vīķe-Freiberga was the sixth President of Latvia and the first female President of Latvia. She was elected President of Latvia in 1999 and re-elected in 2003. Dr. Vaira Vīķe-Freiberga is a professor and interdisciplinary scholar having published eleven books and numerous articles, essays and book chapters in addition to her extensive speaking engagements. As President of the Republic of Latvia 1999–2007, she was instrumental in achieving membership in the European Union and NATO for her country. She is active in international politics, was named Special Envoy to the Secretary General on United Nations reform and was official candidate for UN Secretary General in 2006. She remains active in the international arena and continues to speak in defense of liberty, equality and social justice, and for the need of Europe to acknowledge the whole of its history. In December 2007 she was named vice-chair of the Reflection group on the long term future of the European Union. She is also known for her work in psycholinguistics, semiotics and analysis of the oral literature of her native country.

Sandra Kalniete is a Latvian politician, diplomat and independence movement leader. She served as Minister of Foreign Affairs of Latvia 2002–2004 and as European Commissioner for Agriculture. Since 2009, she has served as Member of the European Parliament. She is an author of several books. The most famous one is *Ar balles kurpēm Sibīrijas sniegos (With dancing shoes in Siberian snows)*, a book about the deportation of her family to Siberia during the Joseph Stalin era and her family's efforts to return to their home country. Having been born into a family who were the victims of Soviet crimes, Sandra Kalniete is involved in many human rights causes pertaining to totalitarian crimes. She is the chair of the Reconciliation of European Histories Group, an all-party group in the European Parliament aimed at coming to terms with the totalitarian past in many countries of Europe.

Māra Zālīte is a Latvian writer. She was born in a family, which was politically repressed by the soviet regime. In 1956 her family returned from the exile in Siberia to Latvia. She became an important spokeswoman during the “Singing Revolution” that led to the restoration of the Latvia's national independence. Māra Zālīte is author of several plays and poetry books. She has written also librettos for rock operas. The rock opera of 1988, *Lāčplēsis*, was not only a fact of popular music, but also an event of political significance. The topics of history and mythology, reflected in the rock opera, had a new meaning a the time when the USSR was collapsing and there was a new hope for Latvia to break free from occupation. The creative style of Māra Zālīte is precise, emotionally impressive and close to the imagery of folklore. In nowadays Latvia Māra Zālīte is considered as one of most leading women – opinion leaders in the society.