

# Newsroom

## News



Enlargement  
of the EU

## Interview with Boriss Cilevics, Observer in the European Parliament(Latvia).

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**Mr Cilevics, when you were informed than 2/3 of Latvian voters have voted "Yes" to join the EU, what was your main reaction ?**

My main reaction was a strong feeling of satisfaction for two reasons. First, the turnout was much higher than expected. (of the 9 accession referenda, the latvian referendum with 72,53% participation was the second highest turnout). Second, the campaign revealed the high level of interest that the latvian people have on EU issues. Very few remained indifferent as it is sometimes the case in some of the current member states. So these very positive results bring to and end an important stage of latvian politics and open a new one in which EU issues will play an ever stronger role in public debate.

**As the only latvian member of parliament in the European Socialists Group you had to participate actively to the referendum campaign. From this experience what were according to you the main factors that convinced the latvians to make such a clear choice for Europe ?**

Without hesitation I would say that the main factor was the security that the EU would bring to Latvians especially in safeguarding the independence of Latvia. The historical trauma of being almost constantly occupied is still quite strong among latvians and for a majority of people the EU accession was perceived as possibly for Latvia to consolidate the continuing process of democratisation of the country. The principles of free movement of goods and people were also strong arguments for those electors who already had a good basic knowledge on the EU. However from a social democratic point of view I have to regret that most of the political parties kept silent on the social dimension of the EU. For instance the existence of European directives that increase the protection of workers all over the EU has almost always never been mentioned.

**You just stressed one of the biggest challenge of social democracy in Europe is to emphasize the social dimension of the EU. What will now be the main challenge that Latvia will face to succeed its integration in the EU ?**

Without hesitation to improve the integration of non-ethnic latvian into the latvian society. The campaign has shown that the government has mostly only addressed ethnic latvian voters. For instance in Daugavpils, one of Latvian biggest city situated in the southeast part of Latvia close to the borders with Lithuania and Belaruss composed for 90% of russian speaking population only 31% of the voters supported the accession to the EU.

The accession to the EU will allow us to approach these sensitive questions of linguistic minorities in a broader context. It should make all of us realise that all the latvians what ever their ethnic origin have a lot in common and that they have all entered the EU together. Thinking in european terms should help us to progress toward a more inclusive society.

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### Associated media



Boriss Cilevics, Latvian observer in the Socialist Group in the European Parliament

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