

Latvia: border closure with Belarus emerges as an election campaign issue

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On 4 August, Latvian Prime Minister Andris Kulbergs (the centre-right United List) overturned a decision taken by Interior Minister Jānis Dombrava (the nationalist National Alliance) on 31 July reopening the Pāternieki crossing on the Latvian-Belarusian border during the night of 4–5 August. In July, the interior minister had ordered the closure of the only road border crossing still operating between Latvia and Belarus, formally citing technical problems with local IT systems. According to Dombrava, the measure was intended to enable the relevant authorities to prevent illegal border crossings more effectively.

The interior minister's decision to close the border with Belarus was taken without consulting the prime minister. The move forms part of an election campaign targeting right-wing voters and is intended to weaken the prime minister's position ahead of Latvia's parliamentary elections in October. The Interior Ministry's actions are likely to raise doubts within the EU about the consistency and predictability of Latvia's policy. Minsk, meanwhile, is likely to interpret these actions as a sign of weakness.

Commentary

- **The interior minister's actions form part of the election campaign.** Since taking office on 28 May, Jānis Dombrava has sought to portray himself as a defender of public order ahead of Latvia's parliamentary elections in October. His stated priorities are to curb migration and strengthen the capabilities of the security services through reform. His decision, taken without broader consultation, drew criticism from both Prime Minister Andris Kulbergs and President Edgars Rinkēvičs. Despite these tensions, the governing coalition is expected to remain intact. Formed at the end of May, the cabinet was intended to ensure political stability until the elections (see '[Latvia: Andris Kulbergs' caretaker government](#)').
- **The Latvian government is seeking ways to reduce pressure on the border.** According to Prime Minister Andris Kulbergs, despite a sharp increase in the number of illegal border crossings in recent weeks (12,000 attempts were prevented in 2025 and around 9,000 have already been recorded this year), there are currently insufficient grounds to close the border. Instead, the government is focusing on strengthening border security by reinforcing the Border Guard with additional personnel and completing the electronic border barrier system (see '[Latvia: significant increase in migratory pressure from Belarus](#)').

). Closing the border crossing again remains under consideration. However, a permanent closure would impose costs on Latvia's transport and logistics sector, which accounts for up to 6% of the country's GDP. Latvia's agricultural sector, together with parts of the chemical, pharmaceutical and medical industries, continues to export to Russia and Belarus.

- **Minsk is using the uncertainty surrounding the border issue to discredit Latvia.** In a statement issued on 3 August, the Belarusian Foreign Ministry accused Riga of exploiting the border issue for political purposes, claiming that "the interests of individual political factions prevail" in Latvia. According to Minsk, this approach harms the citizens of both countries and undermines the EU principle of the free movement of goods and people. At the same time, the Belarusian authorities reserved the right to adopt "asymmetrical retaliatory measures". Minsk's objective is to further escalate tensions through information operations and hybrid attacks. This is reflected not only in its increasingly aggressive rhetoric but also in its continued use of migratory pressure.