



PROTECTING SOCIAL RIGHTS IN TIMES OF WAR IN UKRAINE

03 July 2024
Vilnius, Lithuania

BACKGROUND

To take stock of the implementation of the Reykjavik Declaration¹ as well as the Committee of Ministers' operational decisions on reform of the European Social Charter system², the Council of Europe is organising a **High-Level Conference on the European Social Charter** on 3-4 July 2024 in Vilnius, Lithuania. The Conference is organised under the Lithuanian Presidency of the Committee of Ministers. At the conference, ministers responsible for social policy will explore further steps to improve social rights protection and longer-term measures to be taken by the Council of Europe in respect of the Charter. The event will feature plenary sessions, keynote speeches, and parallel events.

The full-scale war launched against Ukraine by the Russian Federation in February 2022 has affected the lives of millions of Ukrainians who fled abroad, became internally displaced, or had their houses destroyed, with their social and economic rights violated. The war has also immensely influenced the social and economic landscape of the Council of Europe member States. It is of utmost importance to **safeguard social human rights in times of war**. The crisis caused by the war against Ukraine should not result in a reduction of the protection of the rights recognised by the Charter, both within Ukraine and beyond its borders.

The case of Ukraine shows that, despite the challenges, horrific destruction, and suffering, the EU integration process remains active, and the reforms in the area of social rights remain high on the agenda of the Ukrainian Government.

The Council of Europe is implementing a **project "Enhanced social protection in Ukraine"** within the framework of the Council of Europe Action Plan for Ukraine "Resiliency, Recovery and Reconstruction" for 2023-2026. The project provides support to the national authorities of Ukraine in launching and implementing reforms in the social rights sphere, aiming to provide a decent level of social protection to the population affected by the war. The project works closely with national authorities and social partners.

Thus, prior to the High-Level Conference on the European Social Charter, an **event on safeguarding social human rights in times of war, using Ukraine as an example**, will be organised. This event will also serve to showcase co-operation activities implemented by the Council of Europe in the area of social rights in support of member States' efforts to implement the European Social Charter.

¹ [Reykjavik Declaration – United around our values](#), Reykjavik Summit 4th Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe, 16-17 May 2023.

The Reykjavik Declaration "United around our values", adopted at the Fourth Summit of the Council of Europe in May 2023, reiterates the crucial role of social justice for democratic stability and security and full commitment to the protection and implementation of social rights as guaranteed by the European Social Charter system. Furthermore, it proposed that a high-level conference on the European Social Charter be organised as a step to take further commitments under the Charter where possible.

² http://search.coe.int/cm/Pages/result_details.aspx?ObjectId=0900001680a8412f

AGENDA

Venue: Conference Hall “Zeta” of the Radisson Blu Hotel Lietuva, Vilnius
(Konstitucijos Av. 20, Vilnius, LT-09308, Lithuania)

Join the event online:

Zoom Meeting

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/87680007580?pwd=ZrDqSKaSXAmK3hz7ag17uCi2ywWCyl.1>

Meeting ID: 876 8000 7580

Passcode: 564652

The agenda's schedule is provided in EEST (UTC+3)

Moderator: Mr Rafael BENITEZ, Director of Social Rights, Health and Environment, DGI, Council of Europe

09:45 – 10:15 **Registration of the participants. Welcome coffee.**

10:15 – 11:00 **Opening remarks**

- **Mr Michael O' FLAHERTY**, Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights
- **Ms Oksana ZHOLNOVYCH**, Minister of Social Policy of Ukraine
- **Mr Vytautas ŠILINSKAS**, Vice-Minister of Social Security and Labour of Lithuania
- **Ms Aoife NOLAN**, President of the European Committee of Social Rights

11:00 – 12:30 **SESSION 1: THE IMPORTANCE OF SOCIAL RIGHTS IN TIMES OF WAR**

The full-scale war launched against Ukraine by the Russian Federation in February 2022 has affected the lives of millions of Ukrainians. Increasingly, more Ukrainians are becoming vulnerable due to the destruction caused by military actions lasting for more than two years. The war in Ukraine also has a fall-out effect on the social and economic landscape in Europe and beyond. Safeguarding social rights during war becomes a crucial task for the Ukrainian authorities and for all countries that have ratified the European Social Charter. This session aims to provide a general overview of the importance of protecting social rights in times of war, with a specific focus on Ukraine's recovery and reconstruction. It will address the following specific issues: the current situation and challenges in the social policy in Ukraine; the ongoing reforms in the social protection area that are transforming the outdated model; the support provided by Lithuania to Ukraine in the context of social policy in times of war; and the support provided by the Council of Europe Development Bank to the recovery and reconstruction of Ukraine.

Keynote speech

Ms Alla FEDOROVA, Member of the European Committee of Social Rights

Speakers

- **Ms Oksana ZHOLNOVYCH**, Minister of Social Policy of Ukraine
- **Ms Galyna TRETIAKOVA**, Head of the Parliament Committee of Social Policy and Protection of Rights of Veterans of Ukraine (online)
- **Ms Tetiana LOMAKINA**, Advisor-Commissioner of the President of Ukraine on Barrier Free Environment
- **Ms Justina JAKŠTIENĖ**, Vice-Minister of Social Security and Labour of Lithuania
- **Mr Carlo MONTICELLI**, Governor of the Council of Europe Development Bank

DISCUSSION

12:30 – 13:30 **Lunch break**

13:30 – 14:40 **SESSION 2: THE EUROPEAN SOCIAL CHARTER AS A STEPPING STONE TO ALIGN WITH THE EU ACQUIS: THE POTENTIAL OF SOCIAL RIGHTS FOR A SMOOTHER ACCESSION**

On 14 December 2023, EU leaders agreed to open accession negotiations with Ukraine and reconfirmed their commitment to continue strong support to the country and its people for as long as necessary. Cooperation with Ukraine in the area of social policy, based on gradual alignment with EU acquis and practices and with international norms and standards, including the European Social Charter, is actively ongoing despite the challenges posed by the war. Enhanced dialogue has been initiated by the Ukrainian authorities with many counterparts from Council of Europe member States in the social policy area. The aim of this session is to present how the enhanced implementation of the European Social Charter, as a social constitution of Europe, can assist in the EU integration process. It will explore which features the Charter and EU standards have in common and address the following specific issues: support to Ukraine in enhancing the implementation of the Charter and aligning national legislation with EU acquis; key takeaways from the Lithuanian experience in approximating EU acquis; and how cooperation projects and experience sharing with other countries, such as Sweden, Estonia, Moldova, and others, can help to make this process smoother.

Keynote speech

Mr Giuseppe PALMISANO, Council of Europe consultant (Italy), Professor in International Law of University of Roma Tre, former President of the European Committee of Social Rights

Speakers

- **Ms Iryna POSTOLOVSKA**, Deputy Minister of Social Policy of Ukraine on European integration
- **Ms Yuliia SOKOLOVSKA**, Deputy Head of the Office of the President of Ukraine
- **Ms Camilla WALTERSSON GRÖNVALL**, Minister for Social Services of Sweden
- **Ms Signe RIISALO**, Minister of Social Protection of Estonia
- **Ms Rita ŽEMAITYTĖ-TACK**, Senior Adviser, International Cooperation Unit, Ministry of Social Security and Labour of Lithuania
- **Ms Svetlana MIRCA**, Head of Coordination of External Assistance, International Cooperation and Protocol Unit, Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of the Republic of Moldova

DISCUSSION WITH CONTRIBUTIONS FROM HIGH-LEVEL PARTICIPANTS OF OTHER COUNTRIES

14:40 – 15:00 **Coffee break**

15:00 – 16:10 **SESSION 3: PROTECTION OF CHILDREN'S RIGHTS IN THE BROAD CONTEXT OF WAR**

The impacts of war are uneven, and they greatly affect children, who are the most vulnerable group. The aim of this session is to present the immense work done by Ukrainian stakeholders and the international community for the effective protection of the social and human rights of Ukrainian children affected by war. The session will cover various pillars: the return of illegally deported children to Russia from the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine; the protection and support of children who have been relocated to Council of Europe member States; efforts to build a system of better care and protection for all children in Ukraine; support for Ukrainian children who found temporary protection in Lithuania; and the key challenges faced, as well as upcoming plans.

- **Mr Dmytro LUBINET**s, Ukrainian Parliament Commissioner for Human Rights (online)

- **Ms Regina JENSDOTTIR**, Head of Division and Council of Europe Co-ordinator for the Rights of the Child, Human Dignity and Gender Equality Department, DG II, Council of Europe (online)
- **Ms Iryna TULIAKOVA**, Head of the Coordinating Centre for the Development of Family Education and Childcare of Ukraine
- **Ms Vilma AUGIENĖ**, Vice-Minister of Social Security and Labour of Lithuania

DISCUSSION

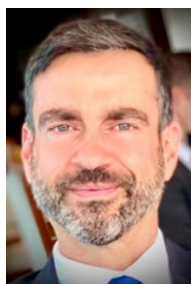
16:10 – 16:25

Closing remarks

- **Mr Claus NEUKIRCH**, Director of Directorate of Programme Co-ordination, Council of Europe
- **Ms Oksana ZHOLNOVYCH**, Minister of Social Policy of Ukraine
- **Mr Simonas ŠATŪNAS**, Vice-Minister of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Lithuania

SHORT BIOGRAPHIES OF THE SPEAKERS

Moderator



Mr Rafael A. Benitez holds a Master's degree in European Law from the College of Europe and degrees in Law and Finance from ICADE - University of Comillas. He studied Political Science at UNED. Currently, he is the Director of Social Rights, Health, and Environment at the Council of Europe, where he has worked since 1994. His previous roles include Director of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities and Chief of Protocol. Mr Benitez has expertise in administrative law, international criminal justice, corruption, terrorism, and public international law. He has published works, spoken at international conferences, and lectured at ITI-RI and IIDH in Strasbourg. He speaks Spanish, English, French, and Italian.

OPENING REMARKS

Speakers



Mr Michael O' Flaherty is the fifth Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe, elected by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe in January 2024 for a six-year, non-renewable term. An Irish human rights lawyer, Mr O'Flaherty has served as Director of the EU Fundamental Rights Agency (2015-2023), member of the UN Human Rights Committee (2004-2012), Chief Commissioner of the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission (2011-2013) and held various posts at the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, including in conflict zones like Sierra Leone and Bosnia and Herzegovina.



Ms Oksana Zholnovych has served as the Minister of Social Policy of Ukraine since July 2022. Holding a Ph.D. in Law, she brings extensive experience in academia and legal practice to her current role. Previously, she held positions as Head of the Department of Social Policy and Health Care at the Office of the President of Ukraine from 2020 to 2022, and as Adviser to the Minister of Social Policy from 2019 to 2020. Her professional background includes directing Eurocontract Lviv LLC from 2017 to 2019 and serving as an Assistant to the Rector of Ivan Boberskyi Lviv State Physical Culture University. Additionally, Ms Zholnovych has held various positions at Ivan Franko National University of Lviv.



Mr Vytautas Šilinskas is Vice Minister of Social Security and Labour of Lithuania. He has a rich educational background including an Executive MBA and a Master of Laws from Vilnius University. His professional journey ranges from serving as legal counsel to achieving senior partnership at «TGS Baltic» and practicing as an attorney at law. Recognized as a Rising Star in employment law by Legal 500, Mr Šilinskas is also a member of the Bar and Pedestrian Associations. Fluent in English and Russian, his interests lie in geopolitics, economics, history, and philosophy.



Ms Aoife Nolan is the President of the Council of Europe's European Committee of Social Rights, joining the Committee in 2017 and serving as its Vice-President from 2021 to 2022. She is a Professor of International Human Rights Law and Director of the Human Rights Law Centre at the University of Nottingham. Professor Nolan has extensive expertise in human rights and constitutional law, particularly in the areas of social and children's rights. She has advised governments and international organizations, including UN bodies, the Council of Europe, and the World Bank. Throughout her career, Professor Nolan has held visiting positions at various academic institutions worldwide and serves as an Academic Expert at Doughty Street Chambers, where she co-leads the Children's Rights Group.

SESSION 1: THE IMPORTANCE OF SOCIAL RIGHTS IN TIMES OF WAR

Keynote speech



Ms Alla Fedorova is an Associate Professor at the Institute of International Relations, Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv, and has been a member of the European Committee of Social Rights since 2023. She holds a Master's degree in Law from Donetsk National University and a PhD in International Law from Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv. She has served as an international consultant on social and economic rights for the Council of Europe and is a certified trainer for the Council of Europe HELP Programme. Additionally, she holds the position of Vice-President of the Ukrainian Association of European Law, serves as deputy editor-in-chief of the Ukrainian Journal of International Law, and is recognized as a prolific author in human rights and social law. Since 2023, she has held the position of MSCA4Ukraine postdoctoral fellow at Palacký University in Olomouc.

Speakers



Ms Oksana Zholnovych has served as the Minister of Social Policy of Ukraine since July 2022. Holding a Ph.D. in Law, she brings extensive experience in academia and legal practice to her current role. Previously, she held positions as Head of the Department of Social Policy and Health Care at the Office of the President of Ukraine from 2020 to 2022, and as Adviser to the Minister of Social Policy from 2019 to 2020. Her professional background includes directing Eurocontract Lviv LLC from 2017 to 2019 and serving as an Assistant to the Rector of Ivan Boberskyi Lviv State Physical Culture University. Additionally, Ms Zholnovych has held various positions at Ivan Franko National University of Lviv.



Ms Galyna Tretiakova is a Member of the Parliament of Ukraine and serves as the Head of the Parliament Committee on Social Policy and Protection of Rights of Veterans of Ukraine. She is recognized as an expert in pension systems and social insurance. Previously, she held the position of CEO of the Ukrainian Federation on Insurance from 2010 to 2019. She has participated in public councils and working groups for several Ukrainian ministries, focusing particularly on the financial sector and Pension System Reform Group. Her legislative efforts cover a wide range of aspects, such as advocating for employment rights for persons with disabilities, facilitating post-war adaptation for military personnel, reforming social insurance, implementing an accumulative pension system, and developing a new Social Code of Ukraine.



Ms Tetiana Lomakina is an Advisor-Commissioner of the President of Ukraine for a Barrier-Free Environment. She plays a key role in developing and moderating policies to foster a barrier-free society. Ms Lomakina oversees the implementation of the Action Plan for the National Strategy to Create a Barrier-Free Environment in Ukraine, focusing on accessibility, diversity, and inclusion, particularly for persons with disabilities, older persons, and parents with young children. Ms Lomakina co-operates with the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine and regional administrations to ensure effective implementation of the strategy, promoting an inclusive and accessible environment across Ukraine.



Ms Justina Jakštienė has been serving as Vice Minister of Social Security and Labour of Lithuania since 2021. Prior to this role, she led the Strategic Planning Group and the Division of Projects on Social Security Infrastructure at the Central Project Management Agency from 2006 to 2021. Her earlier career included extensive experience in municipal administration in Vilnius from 1999 to 2006. Ms Jakštienė holds a Master's degree in Social Demography from Vytautas Magnus University, as well as Master's and Bachelor's degrees in Sociology and Social Work from Vilnius University. Her professional interests include demography, societal development, and state investment efficiency. She speaks English, Russian, Spanish, and German.



Mr Carlo Monticelli, an Italian national, was elected as Governor of the Council of Europe Development Bank on 11 June 2021, beginning his five-year term on 18 December 2021. Previously, he served for six years as Vice-Governor for Financial Strategy at the same institution. Mr Monticelli brings a wealth of experience from his tenure at the Italian Treasury, the European Investment Bank, and SACE. His career also includes positions held at Deutsche Bank in London and the Bank of Italy. He holds a Ph.D. in Economics from the University of Ancona, an M.Sc. from the University of York, and completed post-graduate studies at Oxford University. Additionally, Mr Monticelli is a visiting professor at Sciences Po Paris.

SESSION 2: THE EUROPEAN SOCIAL CHARTER AS A STEPPING STONE TO ALIGN WITH THE EU ACQUIS: THE POTENTIAL OF SOCIAL RIGHTS FOR A SMOOTHER ACCESSION

Keynote speech



Mr Giuseppe Palmisano, who holds a PhD in International Law from the University of Milan, has served as President and General Rapporteur of the European Committee of Social Rights. He is currently a Professor of International Law and International Human Rights Law at the University of Roma Tre, where he is also a Member of the Executive Board of the International Research Centre on Law and Globalization. Recently, Mr Palmisano was elected by the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations to serve as a member of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. His extensive research and professional contributions, comprising over 80 scientific works, focus on areas such as human rights, European protection of social rights, self-determination of peoples, state responsibility, and dispute settlement in International Law.

Speakers



Ms Iryna Postolovska is the Deputy Minister of Social Policy of Ukraine for European Integration. In this capacity, she oversees the EU negotiations process, international relations, and gender equality initiatives. Before joining the Ministry of Social Policy of Ukraine, Ms Postolovska held the position of Senior Health Economist at the World Bank Group in Washington, D.C. She played a key role in developing and evaluating health systems reforms across more than 15 countries, focusing particularly on health financing and service delivery. Ms Postolovska returned to Ukraine in December 2022 to take up the role of Advisor to the Minister at the Ministry of Social Policy of Ukraine. She holds a Doctor of Science degree in Global Health and Population from Harvard University, as well as a Bachelor of Arts degree in Economics and International Studies from Macalester College.



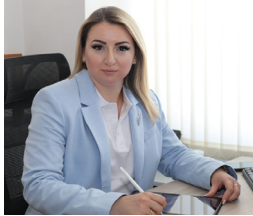
Ms Yuliia Sokolovska currently holds the position of Deputy Head of the Office of the President of Ukraine. In her role, she advises on social and health policies, coordinates the COVID-19 response efforts, and collaborates with international organizations on related projects. Previously, from 2019 to 2020, Ms Sokolovska served as the Minister of Social Policy of Ukraine, where she was actively involved in healthcare reform and contributed to various international projects. Ms Sokolovska holds two degrees: one with honours from Kyiv National Economic University named after Vadym Hetman in 2007, and another from the National Academy for Public Administration under the President of Ukraine in 2016.



Ms Camilla Waltersson Grönvall took office as Sweden's first Minister for Social Services at the Ministry for Health and Social Affairs in October 2022. Her portfolio includes social services, the rights of persons with disabilities, and the rights of the child. Before assuming this position, she served as a member of the Swedish Riksdag and served as the spokesperson for the Moderate Party on social policy matters.



Ms Signe Riisalo has held the position of Minister of Social Protection of Estonia since 26 January 2021, and has been a member of the Estonian Reform Party since 1994. She holds degrees in economics from Tallinn Polytechnic Institute (1989), social work from Tallinn University (1995, 2017), and law from the University of Tartu (2008). In 2017, she completed postgraduate studies in social pedagogy and child protection at Tallinn University. Ms Riisalo has a diverse professional background, having served in the 14th Riigikogu and its committees, and worked at the Ministry of Social Affairs from 1993 to 2019. Her previous roles include Assistant Adviser at the Government Office (1990–1993) and Engineer at Eesti Maaehitusprojekt (1987–1990).



Ms Svetlana Mirca is the Head of Coordination of External Assistance, International Cooperation, and Protocol Unit at the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of the Republic of Moldova. With significant experience in supporting human rights initiatives, she has been instrumental in monitoring child protection policies as a Secretary of the National Council on Child Rights Protection for nearly nine years. Ms Mirca has contributed to developing bilateral and multilateral relations with partners in the Ministry's areas of competence and in international cooperation efforts.

SESSION 3: PROTECTION OF CHILDREN'S RIGHTS IN THE BROAD CONTEXT OF WAR

Speakers



Mr Dmytro Lubinets became the Ukrainian Parliament Commissioner for Human Rights (Ombudsman) in June 2022. Prior to this, he served as a member of the Ukrainian Parliament and chaired the Parliamentary Committee on Human Rights. Mr Lubinets holds a PhD in Political Science from Mariupol State University and is currently pursuing studies in Public Management and Administration. His educational background includes degrees in law from Yaroslav Mudryi National Law University and in international relations from Donetsk National University. In 2014, Mr Lubinets held the position of Secretary of the Committee on Regulation and Organization of Work of the Verkhovna Rada, and he was also a member of the Permanent Delegation to the PA EURONEST.



Ms Regína Jensdóttir holds a law degree from the University of Iceland and a postgraduate degree (D.E.A.) in international public law from the University of Strasbourg. Since 1998, she has worked at the Council of Europe, focusing since 2010 on children's rights as Coordinator and Head of the Children's Rights Division. Ms Jensdóttir oversees the Council of Europe's Steering Committee for the Rights of the Child (CDENF). She is also responsible for implementing the Council of Europe Strategy for the Rights of the Child (2022-2027) and manages the Lanzarote Convention, which aims to protect children from sexual exploitation and abuse. Since 2023, Ms Jensdóttir has also led the Council of Europe Consultation Group on the Children of Ukraine (CGU).



Ms Iryna Tuliakova heads the Coordination Centre for Family Upbringing and Child Care Development at the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine and the Board of the Presidential Foundation for Support of Education, Science, and Sports. She is actively engaged in child protection, education, and youth policy, and is the driving force of the «SpilDiia» charity foundation and the «MriyDiy» network of educational projects. Since June 2024, Ms Tuliakova has led the initiative launched by President Volodymyr Zelenskyi and First Lady Olena Zelenska, with support from European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen. The initiative focuses on reforming Ukraine's comprehensive childcare system and promoting family-based care.



Ms Vilma Augienė serves as Vice Minister of Social Security and Labour, with expertise in Child Rights Protection and Pre-school Education Psychology from Mykolas Romeris University and Vilnius Pedagogical University. Her career includes significant roles such as Deputy Minister of Social Security and Labour in 2017 and 2020. Ms Augienė has held various positions at Vilnius City Municipality, including Deputy Director of Administration, as well as leadership roles in the Social Support Department and the Child Rights Protection Department. She has managed projects at several companies, including UAB “RRW medical trade”, UAB “Sostinės biurai”, UAB “Autarė”, and UAB “Organisations Consulting Group”. Ms Augienė is fluent in English and Russian.

CLOSING REMARKS

Speakers



Mr Claus Neukirch currently serves as Director of Programme Coordination at the Council of Europe, a position he has held since November 2022. Previously, he served as Head of the OSCE Mission to Moldova. His earlier career includes serving as Head of the Council of Europe Office in Tirana and as Team leader/Senior Political Advisor for the German Delegation to the OSCE during Germany’s OSCE Chairmanship in 2016, focusing on policies related to the Ukraine crisis and Transdniestrian settlement. From March 2012 to August 2015, Mr Neukirch was Deputy Director for Operations Service at the OSCE Conflict Prevention Centre. He obtained his Ph.D. from the University of Hamburg, specializing in Conflict Prevention and Management in OSCE missions in Moldova and Estonia. Mr Neukirch studied Political Science at Phillips University Marburg and the University of Hamburg, with a specialization in international relations and causes of war studies.



Ms Oksana Zholnovych has served as the Minister of Social Policy of Ukraine since July 2022. Holding a Ph.D. in Law, she brings extensive experience in academia and legal practice to her current role. Previously, she held positions as Head of the Department of Social Policy and Health Care at the Office of the President of Ukraine from 2020 to 2022, and as Adviser to the Minister of Social Policy from 2019 to 2020. Her professional background includes directing Eurocontract Lviv LLC from 2017 to 2019 and serving as an Assistant to the Rector of Ivan Boberskyi Lviv State Physical Culture University. Additionally, Ms Zholnovych has held various positions at Ivan Franko National University of Lviv.



Mr Simonas Šatūnas currently serves as Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs of Lithuania, contributing to the country’s diplomatic efforts and international relations strategy. He has a distinguished background in diplomacy and foreign affairs, having held various positions within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs prior to his current role. Mr Šatūnas plays a key role in shaping Lithuania’s foreign policy agenda, particularly in areas concerning European Union policy, development of relations with the EU institutions, expansion of cooperation with European countries. Mr Šatūnas is committed to promoting Lithuania’s interests on the international stage and enhancing bilateral relations with key partners around the world. Mr Šatūnas holds a Master’s degree in international relations from the Institute of International Relations and Political Science, Vilnius University. He speaks English, French, Latvian, Russian, Spanish.

FOR NOTES

