

Manuscript
The Danish family in Latvia
TVSYD, Denmark

Presenter: How is life now for a family from a present member state living in one of the future? We have visited a Danish family living in Latvia to see how they live now and how they expect their lives to be, when Latvia joins the EU

Participants:

Signe Lange Hansen, student
Jeppe Lange Nielsen, Country Manager, Hedeselskabet
Sandis Podnieks (soundbite)
Margit Høj Hansen, Office Manager, Danish Chamber of Commerce

Production team:

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Duration: 8'04

Translation

The Danish family in Latvia

TVMidtVest, Denmark

0.02

It is a Tuesday morning in Jurmala in Latvia. A Danish family does the stuff every European family does in the morning. Breakfast and lunch packs.

Events that just as well could take place in any other country - but in a lot of ways the daily life of this family will change, when Latvia joins the European Union. From the daily shopping to their connections to Denmark.

0.26

Signe and Marie are students at the international school in Jurmala. Most of the students at the school are Americans or from countries already in the European Union. Despite of that the girls feel that it is especially the younger part of the Latvian population, who are enthusiastic about the up-coming membership.

0.39

Interview Signe Lange Hansen:

"The young people are quite happy. They think it is really great and they really want the world to come closer to Latvia. The younger they are the better they will like the European Union."

0.55

The family moved to Latvia in 1999, when Jeppe Lange Nielsen began as head of Hedeselskabets Baltic Daughter Company. When Latvia joins Europe the conditions of life for the family will change quite a bit.

1.06

Interview Jeppe Lange Nielsen:

"It really cheap to live in Latvia, especially if you buy local products. Surely now the salary will go up and so will the prices on grocery but the grocery will also be of a better quality."

1.25

This morning Jeppe Nielsen is heading east with one of his local employees. Sandis Podnieks are the manager of a newly started factory about 80 kilometres east of Riga.

1.37

(soundbite Sandis Podnieks)

1.54

Latvia covers an area as Holland and Belgium together. Most of the eastern part is covered with forest. Wood is the most important export article of the country.

2.04

In Mazozolis Hedeselskabet has, in cooperation with another Danish firm, taken possession of the buildings of a former soviet co-operative. Now they are managing an effective factory with 32 workers making firewood. It is a complete contrast to the past and it is a general tendency that will be intensified, when the Latvians are getting easier access to the European market.

2.23

Interview Jeppe Lange Nielsen:

"As an example in forestry they had some standards of production. They produced a certain amount of pulpwood, but they had not calculated if it's been profitable. In Denmark we would calculate if it would be worth it. Now they have to think completely different. In the open market it is the profit that counts."

3.01

The worn-out buildings are going to be renovated so a part of the administration of Hedeselskabet can be moved to the little village. The plan of renovation is being discussed with the local foreman. Today most of the communication is in Latvian, but Jeppe is looking forward to the language barrier getting lower.

3.16

Interview Jeppe Lange Nielsen:

"It will be easier for us and it will be easier for the Latvians to know languages and to go to Western Europe. In five years it will be easier to get employees who talk English. Simply because they will travel more within the EU."

3.39

Latvia is a country of many contrasts. From the poor Mazozolis to the capitol Riga there is a short distance but a large difference in life. Jeppe Nielsen's wife Margit is an office manager of the Danish chamber of commerce - she is on her way to a meeting with a Latvian accountant. He is going to inform the Danish companies in the chamber of commerce about the new VAT-rules after the first of May.

3.59

(soundbites meeting)

4.25

(soundbite meeting)

4.42

Interview Margit Høj Hansen:

"This meeting was an example of what we are doing right now. We are trying to figure out what will happen after the first of May. A lot of people are trying to see in to it, but as a matter of fact nobody really knows what will happen. The new laws are not implemented and nobody knows who will control if the laws are kept. From the first of may all the present EU-delegation leaves and nobody here knows what will follow."

5.27

The firewood factory in Mazozolis is expected to triple its turnover within the year. 20.000 pallets of firewood are going to be shipped out to especially Denmark, Norway and Iceland.

Latvia has through the latter years changed form being a Russian bear to being a Baltic tiger. It's economy is growing with seven to eight percent per year and now the membership of the European union forces the Latvian administration to deal with earlier times bureaucracy.

5.52

Interview Jeppe Lange Nielsen:

"It will all be more transparent. Earlier it was the slow soviet system where corruption flourished. They described one reality and did something else. Now EU is forcing the candidate countries into a more transparent administration."

6.19

Anyhow there is still a long way from the poorest Latvians to the established Europe. The average Latvian is making about a third of the income of an average European citizen. There is no doubt that the clear vote for EC was based on economic hopes.

6.32

Interview Margit Høj Hansen:

"I really think that the Latvians voted yes because they saw no alternative. The elderly have voted yes on the behalf of their children. They all say - naturally we voted yes - but it not a enthusiastic yes to the European Union."

7.13

A day in March in Latvia is coming to an end. The Danish family are playing with the dog, doing the homework and cooking dinner in the house in Jurmala. But still one member of the family is missing. Signe and Marie's bigger sister is studying in Denmark. Along with the coming free market they really hope to see more of her.

7.30

Interview Margit Høj Hansen:

"We all hope it will be different to travel. At present Air Baltic has a monopoly and it is really expensive to fly. We all hope that the discount airlines also will come here. We have one daughter at home in Denmark and this summer the next will go to. So of course we will more often want to travel to Denmark to see them."

7.50

When the membership comes into force at the first of May it will not be a revolution for the family. It will be a process that slowly will change the conditions of the life of the family and bring their new native country closer to Europe.