

Nils Muižnieks (born on 31 January 1964 in the United States) is a Latvian human rights activist and political scientist. Since April 1, 2012 he serves as [Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights](#), succeeding Thomas Hammarberg (2006-2012) and Alvaro Gil-Robles (1999-2006).

Prior to his appointment as Commissioner for Human Rights, he held prominent posts such as Director of the [Advanced Social and Political Research Institute](#) at the Faculty of Social Sciences of the [University of Latvia](#) in Riga (2005-2012); Chairman of the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (2010-2012); Latvian minister responsible for social integration, anti-discrimination, minority rights, and civil society development (2002-2004); and Director of the Latvian Centre for Human Rights and Ethnic Studies - now [Latvian Centre for Human Rights](#) (1994-2002).

### **EARLY LIFE**

His parents, Ansis and Ingrid, were both refugees who left Latvia in 1944. They spent 6 years in displaced persons camps in the American zone in Germany before moving to the United States in 1950. His father is a retired medical doctor and his mother was trained as an architectural historian.

Born and educated in the United States of America, Nils Muižnieks obtained a Ph.D. in political science at the University of California at Berkeley (1993). Prior to that, he obtained a Master of Arts in political science from the same University (1988) and a *summa cum laude* Bachelor of Arts in politics at Princeton University.

In 1992 he married Andra Fedder, who is a piano teacher and singer, with whom he has two daughters. Latvian and English are his mother tongues, and he is also fluent in French and Russian.

### **PROFESSIONAL LIFE**

Nils Muižnieks has been working in the field of human rights for the past two decades and has acquired extensive knowledge in the field of international human rights monitoring, training and education. His activities cover a wide range of human rights issues, including racism and antidiscrimination, the judicial system and domestic safeguards, torture, ill treatment and misconduct by law enforcement officials, conditions in prisons and detention facilities, women's rights, the rights of the child, the rights of persons with intellectual disabilities.

#### **Current work**

On 24 January 2012 he was elected Commissioner for Human Rights by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe obtaining 120 of the votes cast in the first round, an absolute majority. He took office on 1 April 2012 and stated that he intends to develop the contribution of the Commissioner's Office to the effective observance and full enjoyment of human rights in the 47 member states of the Council of Europe. His work as Commissioner for Human Rights pivots on country and thematic work, with a particular focus on the most vulnerable groups, such as children, the elderly, persons with disabilities and Roma.

Further work concerns the human rights of migrants, including, asylum-seekers and refugees; women's rights and gender equality; minority rights; and the importance of respecting human rights standards within the information society, in particular as regards media freedom, data protection, social networking and access to digital literacy.

He is also enhancing the co-operation with national human rights structures with the aim of fostering human rights oriented policies at national level and addressing systemic shortcomings in member states.

#### **Previous work**

As member (2005-2010) and Chair (2010-2012) of the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI), Muižnieks represented ECRI before international political bodies, human rights mechanisms and international organizations such as the EU, OSCE, UN. He was Rapporteur for country reports on Poland, the Netherlands, Slovakia; member of working groups for Ireland, Iceland, Norway; and chair of the working group on combating racism in policing.

During his governmental appointment (2002-2004), he was responsible for social integration policy; the rights of persons belonging to national minorities; combating racial and ethnic discrimination; and civil society development. He was also responsible for legislation in anti-discrimination, social integration, the legal framework for NGOs and coordinated inter-ministerial working groups for the Latvian National Programme on Tolerance and policy framework for strengthening civil society. He advised local governments on integration policy and represented Latvia before the EU, OSCE, UN.

As Director of the Latvian Centre for Human Rights and Ethnic Studies (now Latvian Human Rights Centre), he strengthened the organisational focus on human rights education and promotion; monitoring of closed institutions; and the promotion of gender equality and rights of persons belonging to national minorities.

Nils Muižnieks was also engaged in evaluation and training activities in the field of human rights. Among his main activities, he was the evaluator of a project on democracy building in Belarus; evaluator for the European Commission for the 7th Framework Research Programme on Citizenship and Democratic Ownership; and expert on conflict resolution and social cohesion for the Joint EU assessment mission to Georgia.

As a trainer, he has worked on minority integration in Georgia and Moldova.

## **PUBLICATIONS**

Nils Muižnieks has published extensively on human rights issues, in particular on racism, discrimination and minority rights. Among his long list of publications (below) the following ones are noteworthy.

The most recent one is "[Max van der Stoel and Latvia](#)" which appeared in a special edition of the journal *Security and Human Rights*, Vol. 22, No. 3 (November 2011), and was devoted to the memory of former OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities Max van der Stoel, with whom Muižnieks worked closely in the 1990s.

He also edited and co-wrote [The Geopolitics of History in Latvian-Russian Relations](#) (2011 at the University of Latvia Press), in which he wrote a conceptual introductory chapter and contributed a chapter entitled „Latvian-Russian Memory Battles in the European Court of Human Rights”. In these articles he examines in depth the intertwining of human rights and history issues in the Latvian jurisprudence and the impact of these controversies on Latvian-Russian relations.

Editor and co-writer of [How Integrated is Latvian Society? An Audit of Achievements, Failures and Challenges](#) (University of Latvia Press, 2010), he wrote the book's introduction and conclusion about the situation in Latvia, and contributed a chapter entitled „Social Integration: A Brief History of an Idea”, in which he traces the intellectual history of the concept of social integration in the social science literature and in the work of international human rights bodies and the European Union.

To commemorate 20 years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, he contributed an article entitled [Creating the “Open Society Man” \(and Woman!\)](#), published in *Open Society News* (Fall 2009 issue).

With Ilze Brands Kehris (former chair of the management board of the EU's Fundamental Rights Agency and head of the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities office in the Hague) he

wrote "The European Union, democratization, and minorities in Latvia", a detailed analysis of the role of EU conditionality issues related to citizenship and language in Latvia, which was published in *The European Union and Democratization* (ed. Paul J. Kubicek. London: Routledge, 2003).

## **Full list of publications**

### **Monographs**

2011 *Latvian-Russian Relations: Dynamics Since Latvia's Accession to the EU and NATO*. University of Latvia Academic Press.

2008 *Georgian Security: A Latvian Perspective* (with a contribution by Rasma Karklins). Riga: University of Latvia Press.

### **Academic Articles and Book Chapters**

2011 „Max van der Stoep and Latvia,” *Security and Human Rights*, Vol. 22, No. 3 (November 2011), 257-260.

2011 „History, Memory and Latvian Foreign Policy,” and „Latvian-Russian Memory Battles at the European Court of Human Rights.” In *The Geopolitics of History in Latvian-Russian Relations*, ed. Nils Muižnieks . Riga: University of Latvia Press, 7-18, 207-226.

2010 „Introduction,” „Social Integration: A Brief History of An Idea,” and „Conclusion.” In *How Integrated is Latvian Society? An Audit of Achievements, Failures and Challenges*, ed. Nils Muižnieks. Riga: University of Latvia Press, 7-32, 279-284.

2010 “Responsibility in Latvia’s Relations with the Diaspora.” In *Latvia Human Development Report 2008/2009: Accountability and Responsibility*, ed. Juris Rozenvalds and Ivars Ijabs. Riga: University of Latvia Press, 130-135.

2009 „A Political Scientist’s Experience in the Real World of Politics,” *European Political Science (EPS)* 8, 2009, 68-78.

2008 „Introduction” (with Daunis Auers); „Anti-Americanism in Latvia: An Exploratory Essay” (with Pēteris Vinkelis). In *Latvia and the USA: From Captive Nation to Strategic Partner*, ed. Daunis Auers. Riga: University of Latvia Press, 5-8, 119-126.

2008 “Latvia: managing post-imperial minorities” (with David J. Galbreath). In *Minority Rights in Central and Eastern Europe*, ed. Bernd Rechel. London: Routledge, 135-150.

2008 “Introduction”; “Latvia’s Economy – the Offshore Next Door”; “Conclusion”. In *Manufacturing Enemy Images? Russian Media Portrayal of Latvia*, ed. Nils Muižnieks . Riga: University of Latvia Press, 5-8, 145-160, 161-3.

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2005 “Preface”, “Latvia”. In *Racist Extremism in Central and Eastern Europe*, ed. Cas Mudde. London: Routledge, X-XII, 101-128.

2003 “The European Union, democratization, and minorities in Latvia” (with Ilze Brands Kehris). In *The European Union and Democratization*, ed. Paul J. Kubicek. London: Routledge, 30-55.

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2002 “Human Development and Human Rights”, “Non-Citizens”. In *Tautas attīstība (Human Development)*, ed. Evita Lune. Riga: UNDP/Soros Foundation – Latvia, Jumava. (in Latvian), 31-38 and 216-223.

2000 “Minority Rights”, “The Historical Development of Human Rights in Latvia 1918-2000”. In *Cilvēktiesības Latvija un pasaule (Human Rights in the World and in Latvia)*, ed. Ineta Ziemele. Riga: Izglītības soli. (in Latvian), 114-121 and 191-240.

- 1998 "Civic Consciousness: Criteria and Indicators." In *Pilsoniska apzina (Civic Consciousness)*, ed. Elmars Vebers. Riga: LU FSI. (in Latvian), 36-42.
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- 1995 "Ethnic Stratification in Latvia: From the Soviet Era to the Present". In *Nacionālā politika Baltijas valstīs (Ethnic Policy in the Baltic States)*, ed. Elmars Vebers and Rasma Karklina. Riga: LZA FSI. (in Latvian), 114-121.
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- 1987 "The Daugavpils Hydro Station and Glasnost' in Latvia". *Journal of Baltic Studies* 18 (April 1987), 63-70.

### ***Policy Papers and Political Analysis***

Regular analyses of Latvian foreign and domestic policy for Oxford Analytica.

- 2011 „Latvia’s New Broom Coalition Wins Votes Despite Sweeping Cuts,” *Europe’s World*, Spring No. 17, 133-4.
- 2010 "Latvian-Russian Relations – A New Thaw?," *Baltic Rim Economies*, Issue No. 2, 28 April 2010, p. 23.
- 2009 Nils Muižnieks, Ilona Kunda, Aija Lulle, Sigita Zankovska-Odiņa, [Immigrant Integration in Latvia](#), ASPRI Working Paper No. 1, September 2009.
- 2008 "Latvia still among the flies in the EU-Russia ointment". *Europe’s World* Autumn, No. 10, 195-6.
- 2001 "Extremist Threats to Democracy in Europe in 2000 and 2001". Background Paper commissioned by the Political Affairs Committee of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, November.
- 2001 "Expert Review Mission on Latvian National Human Rights Office and Ombudsman Functions in Latvia, Final Report." With John Hucker, Janis Mazeiks, Lauri Lahtimaja. Riga: UNDP/OSCE Mission to Latvia. (Published in Latvian in *Latvijas vestnesis (Government Herald)*, 19 June 2001.
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- 2008 Review of *Taming Ethnic Hatred: Ethnic Cooperation and Transnational Networks in Eastern Europe* by Patrice McMahon, in *Journal of Baltic Studies* December 2008, Vol. 39, Issue 4, 537-544.
- 2005 "Response to James Hughes." In *Development and Transition*, UNDP and London School of Economics and Political Science, No. 2, November 2005, 26-7.
- 2005 "The Fate of Europe’s Minorities." Review of Leo Dribins, *National and Ethnic Minorities in Europe*. *Diena* 18 March 2005 (in Latvian).
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2001 "The Gloomy Backrooms of Our Political Life." Review of Latvia Human Development Report 2000/2001.

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2007 The National Minorities Convention – the Prevention of Discrimination and the Preservation of Identity in Latvia. Riga, University of Latvia Academic Publishers. (in Latvian).

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