

Biography of the President of the Republic of Latvia

Dr. Vaira Vike-Freiberga



Dr. Vaira Vike-Freiberga, President of the Republic of Latvia, was elected on 17 June 1999 by the Parliament for a four-year term and has been re-elected for a second term in 2003. She was named Special envoy on the reform of the United Nations in 2005 and was an official candidate of the Baltic States (Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania) for the position of Secretary General in 2006.

Childhood and education (1937-1965)

Vaira Vike was born on 1 December 1937 in Riga, Latvia. To escape the Soviet occupation, her family fled the country on 1 January 1945 and became refugees. Vaira began her schooling in refugee camps in Germany and continued in French Morocco, first at the elementary school in Daourat and then at the Girls' College Mers-Sultan in Casablanca.

After arriving in Canada in 1954, she had to work for a year in a bank, and then entered the University of Toronto, obtaining a B.A. (1958) and an M.A. (1960) in Psychology. While studying, she worked as part-time teacher and Spanish translator, and afterwards as a full-time clinical psychologist at the Toronto Psychiatric Hospital (1960-61). Resuming her education at McGill University in Montreal, she earned a doctorate (Ph.D.) in experimental psychology in 1965. She speaks Latvian, English, French, German and Spanish.

Professional career (1965-1999)

From 1965 to 1998 Vaira Vike-Freiberga pursued a professorial career at the Department of Psychology of the French-speaking University of Montreal, where she taught psychopharmacology, psycholinguistics, scientific theories, experimental methods, language and cognitive processes. Her experimental research focused on memory processes and language, and the influence of drugs on cognitive processes. At the same time she did scholarly research on semiotics, poetics and the structural analysis of computer-accessible texts from an oral tradition -- the Latvian folksongs (Dainas). During this period she authored ten books and about 160 articles, essays or book chapters and has given over 250 speeches, allocutions and scientific communications in English, French or Latvian, and gave numerous radio, TV and press interviews in various languages. Vaira Vike-Freiberga is a member of the Writers' Union of Latvia (2004).

Since 1957, she has been actively engaged in community service, focusing on questions of Latvian identity and culture, and the political future of the Baltic States.

Dr. Vike-Freiberga has held prominent positions in national and international scientific and scholarly organisations, as well as in a number of Canadian governmental, institutional, academic and interdisciplinary committees, where she acquired extensive administrative experience. Recipient of many medals, prizes and honours for distinguished work in the humanities and social sciences.

In June 1998 she was elected Professor emerita at the University of Montreal and returned to her native land, Latvia, where on 19 October the Prime Minister named her Director of the newly founded Latvian Institute.

Presidency of the Republic of Latvia (since 1999)

On 17 June 1999, Vaira Vike-Freiberga was elected President of the Republic of Latvia by the Parliament (Saeima). In 2003 she was re-elected for a second term of four years with 88 votes out of 96.

She has actively exercised the powers conferred to the President by the Constitution of the Republic of Latvia and has played a leading role in achieving Latvia's membership in NATO and the European Union. Invited speaker at numerous international events. Outspoken pundit on social issues, moral values, European historical dialogue, and democracy, she was awarded the 2005 Hannah Arendt Prize for political thought.

Member of the Council of Women World Leaders since 1999. Regularly invited participant to the World Economic Forum (Davos), and to the annual meetings of the American Academy of Achievement since 2000.

Since 1999, she has received many medals and awards, twenty-seven Orders of Merit and ten honorary doctorates. Three biographies about President Vaira Vike-Freiberga have been published in Latvian, English, French, Spanish, Italian, Finnish and Russian.

Family

Since July 1960 married to Imants Freibergs, Professor of Informatics at the University of Quebec in Montreal until 1999, and since 2001 President of the Latvian Information and Communication Technologies Association (LIKTA). Their son Karlis lives in Riga, Latvia, and works as a speechwriter and free-lance translator, editor and journalist. Their daughter Indra is Director of the Latvian Investment and Development Agency Representation Office in London, UK.

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Professional career (1965-1999)

From 1965 to 1998 Vaira Vike-Freiberga was a professor at the Department of Psychology of the French-speaking University of Montreal. She taught psychopharmacology, psycholinguistics, scientific theories, experimental methods, language and cognitive processes. Her experimental research, supported by grants from the National Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada (NSERC), focused on memory processes and language, and the influence of drugs on cognitive processes. She has supervised the theses of many Master's and Doctoral students.

At the same time she did scholarly research on semiotics, poetics and the structural analysis of computer-accessible texts from an oral tradition -- the Latvian folksongs (Dainas). Her research (jointly with her husband, informatics professor Imants Freibergs) was supported by grants from the Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC). Together they published a book and a data base on the Latvian Sun-songs in 1988.

During this period she authored nine books and about 160 articles, essays or book chapters and has given over 250 speeches, allocutions and scientific communications in English, French or Latvian. Some articles have been translated into Swedish, Polish, Russian, German and Lithuanian. She gave numerous radio, TV and press interviews in various languages. Vaira Vīķe-Freiberga is a member of the Writers' Union of Latvia (2004).

Since 1957, Dr. Vike-Freiberga has been actively engaged in community service, focusing on questions of Latvian identity and culture, and the political future of the Baltic States. She became a specialist of Latvian folklore and encouraged young Latvians to learn about their cultural heritage. She has been a lecturer, director and president of the Board of directors of the Latvian Cultural Heritage Seminars for university level participants (1965-85) and subsequently for families, in North and South America, Europe and Australia. A renowned public speaker, she was regularly invited to cultural and social events and published many articles on these questions in Latvian, English and French.

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