

President of Latvia: Law on Local Governments should regulate how sustainability of Song Festival movement is achieved

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Today, President of Latvia and Patron of XII Latvian Youth Song and Dance Festival Egils Levits had an online meeting with the coordinators and art directors of Song and Dance Festival. He stressed the foundational value of Song Festival for the Latvian nation and its continuity. As one of the pillars of Latvian language and culture amidst the globalisation, festival continues to play an important role to this day.

President thanked everyone who is responsible for the Song and Dance Festival activities. 'Song festival movement is like perpetuum mobile, endless energy, generated by you. In addition to its cultural significance, I believe it also plays an important social role, giving the sense of togetherness every day to everyone who is involved,' said Egils Levits.

Nauris Puntulis, Minister for Culture and Chair of the Song Festival Steering Committee, underlined that sustainability of the festival movement is one of the major priorities in the build-up to the 150th anniversary of the Song Festival in 2023.

Participants discussed the challenges on the way to this summer's XII Latvian Youth Song and Dance Festival. Agra Bērziņa, who is the Executive Director of XII Latvian Youth Song and Dance Festival, informed that this year's festival will take place in a decentralised fashion (small participant groups) between July and October to avoid mass gatherings. Due to virus, festival outdoor events held in Riga and the regions of Latvia will have to comply with stringent safety rules.

Romāns Vanags, conductor and Chair of the Art Committee of the XII Latvian Youth Song and Dance Festival, pointed out that 'right now people need that physical and spiritual vaccine, and Song Festival experience is a bonding element of people, which contributes to the sense of unity. We must find all forms in which this year's festival can go forward in current public health context. This generation needs its dose of Song Festival – it is vital for continuity of this movement'.

According to President Levits, Song and Dance Festival is a process which is in constant movement. Continuity of this process is vital. Law on Local Government should clearly specify how local governments should nurture national culture and support Song and Dance Festival movement.

Discussion continued with an exchange of views on how to support this movement remotely, especially given the psycho-emotional pressure experienced by schools. Zanda Mūrniece, choreographer and Director of XII Latvian Youth Song and Dance Festival Gala Dance Concert 'Golden brooch of sun rays' ("Saule vija zelta rotu"), said it is important to keep youngsters and group directors motivated and keep them working towards Song and Dance Festival day in, day out to be able to participate remotely and keep the movement going. It is crucial to make sure 'dancing, singing and Latvian values are still trendy'.

According to Mārtiņš Klišāns, conductor and member of the Song and Dance Festival Steering Committee, 'our pride depends on whether we will be able to bring the best version of this festival this summer despite all the complications, of which there are plenty'. He also pointed towards the need to eliminate bottlenecks in education – right now this causes problems with availability of boy's choirs and participation of men's choirs in the Festival.

Discussion then switched to preparation for the Nationwide Song And Dance Festival in 2023, and urgent priorities requiring immediate attention.

Jānis Purviņš, Art Director of 2023 Nationwide Song and Dance Festival Gala Dance Concert 'Perpetual motion', told that dancers are currently rehearsing remotely and have found clever ways to cope with current restrictions, but it will not last long. 'Dance groups, like athletic teams, should be allowed to practice outside – meeting safety rules, of course, remains mandatory,' said Mr Purviņš.

Discussion also focused on most effective practical ways of ensuring sustainability of Song and Dance Festival movement and meeting its funding needs. Signe Pujāte, Director of Latvian National Centre for Culture, mentioned that it is important to make sure future of the Song and Dance Festival movement is recognised on the political and local level despite current turmoil: 'Regional reform has made many culture industry workers worried about the future of culture centres and directors of art groups. Sustainability of the Song and Dance Festival movement must be stipulated by the Law on Local Governments.'

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