

President of Latvia: Estonia and Latvia have a long shared history, close cooperation and future plans centred around growth, development, green and digital environment

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Egils Levits



On 2 March, H. E. Mrs Kersti Kaljulaid, President of the Republic of Estonia, paid a working visit to Latvia. This visit symbolically marks the mutual *de iure* recognition of Latvia and Estonia and establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries after international recognition *de iure*.

Statement by the President of Latvia Egils Levits

Today I had the pleasure to host President of Estonia Kersti Kaljulaid in Riga.

Today marks 100 years since our countries established diplomatic relations. These were the first diplomatic relations our countries established after their international recognition *de iure*, and, of course, we started with our neighbours. Today is therefore a historic day for our countries, and I think this is generally an important day in our history, because hundreds of years before the founding of our states we were part of the same political system, Livonia, and later other systems as well. Our nations are a lot older than our states, which are hundred years old already. Today is a big and significant day for our relations.

Over these hundred years, our countries have gone through periods of prosperity, occupation, restoration of independence, accession to the European Union (EU) and NATO. We need to build on this solid foundation, continue moving forward side-by-side and efficiently address challenges faced by the Baltic countries, Europe and the world.

In the recent past, the EU has been shaken by several crises, especially the pandemic. That is why we need more powerful, open and united Europe, capable of facing the challenges and reforming itself. This is a very demanding goal. Economic recovery of

Europe, centred around green and digital agenda, is very demanding.

We cannot ignore the problems with the rule of law in Europe either. Europe needs shared and clear understanding of what rule of law implies. The Conference on the Future of Europe is the right format for shaping common European position on many areas that unite us. I hope rule of law is one of them.

Estonia and Latvia have both reached a substantial progress in terms of digital transformation of their economies and governance systems. Many cross-border government services have been digitised, and artificial intelligence translation software developed by Latvian company Tilde is one of the tools that made it possible. Our today's briefing is still translated by human interpreter, but Tilde's tool is gaining popularity not only in our countries, but also elsewhere in the world. Our digital success story is a good basis for fruitful cooperation on what I call better 'information hygiene' – Estonia and Latvia have the necessary hands-on experience in deflecting cyber attacks and disinformation.

As regards to disinformation, today President Kaljulaid and I discussed how our countries are dealing with COVID-19 pandemic, including public awareness about safety and importance of vaccination. The quicker we vaccinate majority of our population, the quicker we will return to normal.

We discussed the overall situation with COVID-19 in our countries, Europe and how governments try to curb the pandemic.

Clearly, we have been living under the pressure of the pandemic for a while, and it will continue to have a lasting impact on our lives for years to come. That is why sustainable recovery from current crisis was also part of our today's discussion. European Recovery and Resilience Facility funding must be invested in a way that gives our economies a push, and also helps us implement sustainable reforms. I understand that it is not easy to put such ambitious projects together on such short notice, but our governments are doing their best right now.

Estonia and Latvia have shared renewables targets. We both want to achieve full energy independence from Russia. In four years from now, in 2025, our power grids will be synchronised with Western Europe.

We will also discuss the implementation of Rail Baltica project. We are looking forward to fruitful cooperation with the EU on further implementation of the project.

Estonia was responsible for coordination of cooperation within the Three Seas Initiative last year. It is the initiative that unites 12 EU Member States and also successfully strengthens the ties between our region and USA, a strategic partner of project countries alongside Germany and European Commission.

President Kaljulaid and I also exchanged views on political situation in our countries. We discussed global agenda and multilateral challenges that concern us all. We will also discuss Estonia's experience in UN Security Council.

We, of course, also talked about the situation in our Eastern neighbourhood and EU's Eastern Partnership agenda, which must move forward. We, of course, also talked about Russia. We condemn the illegal sentencing of opposition leader Alexei Navalny and his imprisonment at prison camp. We, as the whole EU, demand his release. We also demand to release all protesters and journalists who were detained.

This is yet another proof that Russian government does not understand European values like democracy, rule of law, human rights and freedom of speech. Estonia and Latvia will continue coordination within EU and other formats with regard to Russia. The same applies to Belarus. We will continue to support the real democratic transition of Belarus.

In 30 years since we restored our independence, we have accrued significant experience of managing societal change and we are ready to pass it on to our Eastern partners and other countries facing similar challenges that require major social transformations.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Estonia and Latvia have a long shared history, close cooperation and future plans centred around growth, development, green and digital environment. Let me once again thank the President of Estonia Kersti Kaljulaid for visiting Latvia!

<https://www.president.lv/en/article/president-latvia-estonia-and-latvia-have-long-shared-history-close-cooperation-and-future-plans-centred-around-growth-development-green-and-digital-environment-0>