

Address of the President of Latvia Egils Levits at the opening of the first Jānis Stradiņš academic lectures event 'Sēlija: true or false. Time, space and public perception limits of Sēlija'

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Let me start by congratulating Stradiņš family, Stenders Society and National Library of Latvia (LNB) on the start of a new tradition with Jānis Stradiņš academic lectures events!

Academic lectures seem to be the most natural way to continue Jānis Stradiņš work. He was interested and active in very many fields. He was a chemist, and many people knew him also for his cultural, historical and public activities. As a scholar, Jānis Stradiņš was keen on almost every area of interest and historical importance for the Latvian nation, so it is no surprise that these lecture events will cover a great diversity of topics.

Latvian National Library is probably the best place for these lectures as it is, indeed, the soul of our national culture. LNB is not just a building. It is the spiritual source for all Latvians, the Latvian nation. Like Jānis Stradiņš, LNB is our intellectual centre of gravity. Jānis Stradiņš was one of the grand intellectuals of his time, and I think it is an excellent idea and very appropriate that these lectures named after him are taking place at the LNB.

Every nation has its outstanding and exceptional people. Personalities who have shaped the public perception at the age in which they lived, contributing to their nation and leaving a legacy behind. A legacy, which remains long after. Contribution, which is still relevant, exciting and can be refined further. We, the Latvians, have many unique people, and Jānis Stradiņš is among the best of them.

Deep, encyclopaedic mind was Jānis Stradiņš main asset. But encyclopaedic mind is only the beginning. You also need creativity to be able to put knowledge to good use and achieve an intellectual breakthrough, to reinforce the knowledge with a thought. Jānis

Stradiņš was able to build many thoughts on his encyclopaedic knowledge. As a scholar and, of course, as a scientist, he was very precise in his thinking. He stood out. He had his own intellectual signature built on precision, breadth and depth.

That is why Jānis Stradiņš played such a big role in development of historical memory of Latvian nation. The term third awakening that we still use today was coined by Jānis Stradiņš. He looked back at the two previous awakenings of our nation and said, 'Now we have the Third Awakening'. This is how he defined and described that time, creating a link between the first, the second and the third awakening.

Academic lectures give their authors an opportunity to make their own contribution to the historical and cultural identity of the Latvian nation. But it goes a lot further than that. These lectures also give us a better understanding of the relevance of our cultural and historical heritage today and in future.

As regards to today, these lectures, the first contemplative session will focus on Sēlija, which is very symbolic because Jānis Stradiņš was born in Sēlija and his cultural and historical identity was very much formed by this Latvian land.

I believe that the term 'Latvian land' is very appropriate here. Until now we distinguished four Latvian lands, but there are actually five. Sēlija, which due to unknown reasons was not included in the name of Kurzeme–Zemgale Duchy, has always been slightly in the shadows. But Selonians have always been the fifth indigenous group of people in Latvia. Sēlija is a distinct region that is unlike Latgale, Vidzeme, Zemgale or Kurzeme. Jānis Stradiņš had started uncovering Sēlija to rediscover the Selonian heritage, which, of course, is part of heritage belonging to people of Sēlija and all the people in Latvia identifying themselves with this cultural and historical heritage.

That is why I drafted a historical Latvian lands law, which is now being reviewed by the parliament, emphasising that there are five such lands, including Sēlija, too. I have visited Sēlija, met with inhabitants of the region and they claimed their support to my legislative initiative. They also stressed that Selonian heritage underpins and underlies everything they do here as part of the Latvian identity. And vice-versa, Latvian identity and heritage is deeply rooted in Latvian lands. I think that like other historical lands, Sēlija and its historical heritage is part of the common historical heritage of the Latvian nation. So, it is obvious that Sēlija makes our nation richer.

I hope you will find today's lectures exciting and learn more about the Selonian identity and how it helps shape the modern Latvianness. Thank you for having me. It is a pity that we are meeting remotely, but I am certain that next year's event will take place in much more familiar format for us. I wish you a productive and interesting discussion and many stimulating thoughts. I am absolutely convinced there will be plenty of those. Thank you!



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