

## President of Latvia and Mayor of Riga: capital should have a special regulation in local government law

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Today, President of Latvia Egils Levits met with Mayor of Riga Mārtiņš Staķis in the Riga Castle to discuss a wide range of topics linked to development of Latvia's capital.

President Levits congratulated Mārtiņš Staķis on his election as the Riga Mayor in person and enquired about new mayor's views on how to strengthen the role of capital through legislation, capital's strategic development, transport infrastructure, housing policy, education and other initiatives.

Head of Riga municipality informed the President that one his first priorities is to transform the tourism development agency Live Riga into Riga Investment Agency. Agency would be in charge of broader scope of responsibilities and would work towards attracting new investment projects to the city. Other priorities of the new Riga mayor are linked to better governance, zero tolerance towards corruption and adequate risk assurance, inter alia, visa-a-vis municipal enterprises.

Egils Levits and Mārtiņš Staķis discussed the essential features of long-term housing policy for Riga. This policy will be shaped by Rent Law changes currently debated in the Saeima, interaction with tenants' associations, energy efficient housing programmes and need to promote availability of affordable housing in Riga. Mārtiņš Staķis told that Riga City Council has agreed to work together Ministry of Economics on the development of integrated housing policy based on OECD recommendations.

Another major topic raised during the discussion was traffic management problems and meaningful programmes for better transport accessibility and less air pollution generated by vehicles. Mayor Staķis presented plans for integration of AS 'Pasažieru vilciens' passenger trains in urban public transport system to make commute to Riga more convenient and reduce the negative impact of vehicles on the environment.

Transport infrastructure is one of the areas requiring close cooperation between the capital and municipalities located in its agglomeration. Other areas of close cooperation include preschool education and social assistance that are vital for greater Riga region.

President Levits also asked Mayor of Riga about readiness of capital to implement its section of Rail Baltica railway project. Mārtiņš Staķis informed Egils Levits that he is fully aware of the national significance of the project and that a dedicated team of experts has been created and has started working on the project to catch up with the timeframe as several project activities in the capital have been delayed.

President and Mayor also discussed legal framework regulating local governments and agreed that it is absolutely crucial to include a clearer description of capital's role and functions in the updated Local Government Law because Riga has specific tasks that other municipalities do not.

Egils Levits and Mārtiņš Staķis discussed Lāčplēsis Day and Proclamation Day celebrations and urged everyone to pay tribute to fallen Latvian soldiers and celebrate the 102nd Anniversary of Proclamation of the Republic of Latvia with family members because larger ceremonies and gatherings have been cancelled this year due to the pandemic.



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