

# Address of the President of Latvia, Egils Levits, at the School2030 conference 'School for every child'

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Dear teachers,

Dear project managers and beneficiaries of *School2030*,

I feel truly honoured to address you at this important moment, which marks the end of an ambitious new curricula and school reform project. Thank you for your hard work!

But, as we all know, the hardest task is still ahead of us: we will need to turn it into reality.

I

Dear teachers,

Society has placed an enormous responsibility on schools and educators. You are responsible for our future social environment.

Quality of our social environment depends on us, those who live together in the same place. We make up today's social environment, and our children and young people, who are in schools today, will determine its quality 20, 30 and 50 years from now.

That is why I believe we must make sure that education reform gives us a clear answer as to what kind of people will make up our social environment in 2030, then 2040, and so on. We must also acknowledge the fact that changes in education are a process

that consists of many small improvements and new adjustments to constantly bring education closer to perfection. And that will always be a never-ending effort.

I am sure there have been many long discussions among educators on what the reform should be to enable schools to raise a good person, what qualities future adults with whom we will build our country in future should possess.

## II

I am, however, surprised that the purpose of education is not constantly discussed among policy makers, philosophers, intellectuals and general public. Instead we hear complaints about different solutions or skills and knowledge list for future workforce. People are treated more like a resource, for example, an economic resource, and not as a developing person. I think we need a positive discussion in our public space to come to a more refined understanding of how we should approach the issue that plays a really strategic role in future sustainability of our nation and be able to help parents, teachers and society as a whole how they impact the development of a young person.

## III

I should also point out that other European countries are much more active in debating the purpose of education. Some countries have even laid down these objectives in their constitutions.

For example, constitution of Bavaria, a federal state of Germany, which says that schools shall not only impart knowledge and skills but also develop the nobleness of the heart and the character, and the paramount educational goals are willingness to accept responsibility, readiness to help others, open-mindedness for everything that is true, good and beautiful. It also underlines that pupils must be educated in the spirit of democracy, to love their Bavarian homeland and the German people.

And Article 14 of the Constitution of Austria also says that 'Democracy, humanity, solidarity, peace and justice as well as openness and tolerance towards people are the elementary values of the school, based on which it secures for the whole population, independent from origin, social situation and financial background a maximum of educational level, permanently safeguarding and developing optimal quality'. It also provides that young people should be 'creative humans capable to take over responsibility for themselves, fellow human beings, environment and following generations, oriented in social, religious and moral values'.

One might, of course, say these are just nice slogans. However, these constitutional principles are much more than empty slogans if you take Western legal doctrines. These are clear, legal instructions for governments and schools. They describe the kind of young person society wants to see.

Aligning of diverse education goals and their efficient implementation is the matter of policies and public debate. That is why education goals and, more importantly, process and approaches used to provide it are a constant subject of public democratic discourse. I believe our public discourse and attention should also focus on debate and clear ideas on what our education system should provide and how to best achieve these goals.

The provisions of the two constitutions I mentioned are just examples. We too, of course, have defined these goals in our laws, but not the constitution.

## IV

Dear educators,

*Skola2030* reform plan is built around three words: knowledge, skills and attitude. Reform goals are strongly focused on individual's personal development ensuring success in the changing and uncertain 21st century world. Very wise.

However, there is one reform keyword that I would specifically like to single out in my today's speech. The third one, attitude.

Attitude is the manifestation of values, or their outer layer. Values form our personality. They manifest themselves in our

attitudes and actions. Values, of course, come from family, but it is in fact school that teaches us these values during the most important period of our lives, the formative years.

Fundamental law of the Latvian State does not establish education goals *expressis verbis*, as did the examples that I mentioned, but shared values of our state and society, values that are defined in the Preamble, are very much a blueprint for raising new generations of Latvians.

It is a must-have we can find in the Preamble of Satversme. A set of values that contributes to normal social environment made better by each generation of Latvians.

V

Values enshrined in our constitution are a part of a single system. We need dignity and freedom to develop as free individuals who respect the freedom of others. Equality does not mean we are all the same. It urges us to treat every fellow Latvian equally. Solidarity, justice and fairness are values that are fundamental to meaningful social interactions and good social environment. Concern for yourself, your relatives and society at large requires both ability to take care of your life and also help less privileged members of society, and will to fulfil your democratic duty. Responsibility towards future generations, environment and nature means our generation does not have the right to exhaust and deplete earth's current resources. We must pass them to the next generation at least in the same shape they were handed to us, or maybe even better shape.

Dear teachers,

Values need space to exist. Values tend to be controversial and may clash. Most often they clash with each other. That is why system of values with clear hierarchy and moral dilemmas is even more important than the values. Moral dilemmas that require you to choose between two or more values are most indicative of the system of values accepted by a particular society. Each of us has our own system, but, as a rule, most societies have one common system of values to go by. And it is this common system of values that determines what the society will look like. This system of values and the government model are closely tied together. Authoritarian and totalitarian societies live by their own set of values, whereas democratic societies have different systems that are almost completely unlike those of authoritarian or totalitarian societies.

According to Satversme, Latvia is a democratic, socially responsible and national state governed by the rule of law. Our society should support value system that reflects the government model established by constitution. Democracy, rule of law, social responsibility and Latvianness, including national heritage, Latvian language and culture, are the binding elements of our state. Our state can function because our people have accepted these values and the whole system of values fundamental to modern Latvia.

You, dear teachers, and schools play an enormous role in teaching how to understand what these values and system of values implies, how to internalise them, and passing them on to young people. I hope that your everyday efforts to give pupils the knowledge and skills will also include greater focus on these values and their system. I hope you will integrate moral dilemmas into your class activities to teach young people how to decide which values are more important in different life situations. Each society solves these moral dilemmas differently. Democratic societies prefer solutions that fit their democratic government model.

VI

Dear teachers,

This spring was extremely challenging. Lockdown gave a huge boost to usage of remote technologies and also exposed our weaknesses, and education sector was no exception. However, your sector adjusted with enviable speed, you quickly moved to remote platforms and ensured uninterrupted learning process. It, of course, was not an easy task, but you, dear colleagues, did it.

But distance learning also came at a cost: teachers no longer met with their pupils, young people, face to face. New technologies and approaches will, of course, continue to play ever bigger role in schools, but there is nothing better than teacher's personal

guidance and help. To unleash the full potential, teachers need direct communication with pupils, they need to learn the character of each child and youngster to do so. School is not the place where everyone becomes the same. It is a place where everyone is given an equal chance to succeed, especially when there is so much inequality in our society. It is a kind of solidarity adjustment, and school is a part of the joint effort.

VII

Dear educators and teachers,

Thank you all for all the work and learning that you yourself had to do to make this ambitious education reform possible.

Good luck with your work and for the next school year, the first year with new curricula. Your success and achievements will determine how successful we as a society will be. Thank you!



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