

Address by President of Latvia Egils Levits at the State Forest Research Institute “Silava”

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Honourable scientists!

It is a true pleasure for me to be here today among the elite of Latvian science and see this institute, which represents such an important industry for Latvia – forestry science. For Latvians, forestry science, forests and the forestry sector hold double importance. First, of course, is the practical economic role, but there is also an emotional significance, as we believe ourselves to have a very special bond with nature. And forests are, of course, a major part of Latvia's nature. As scientists you study this field, providing us with suggestions on how to treat our forests better.

In practical terms, forestry provides many jobs. Over 30 thousand people are employed in forestry, which is one of the largest sectors of agriculture in Latvia. But, naturally, forests are also a pleasant place to spend one's time and rest, gather mushrooms and berries or simply walk around.

I am honoured to be here in Silava also because Silava provides a special contribution to the forestry sector allowing us to better manage this natural resource of Latvia. According to the statistics, approximately half of Latvia's territory is covered in forests. And the amount of forests has increased in recent decades. Also, in practical terms, thanks to the input you provide, forest owners can plant trees not only for their children, grand-children and great-grand-children, but also for themselves, due to the aspen clone created here, which reaches felling age within 20 years.

In an emotional sense forests hold a special message, granting us a feeling of security and being home. By the way, social psychologists have made an interesting observation regarding art. If we look at, for example, artwork from the Renaissance period or later, in paintings created north of Central Europe depicting forests, trees and greenery, there is something captivating about it, instilling a sense of security. In turn, in paintings from Southern Europe, forests and thickets are depicted as something

dangerous, they are viewed more as a threat – a place one can get lost, be attacked by robbers and so forth. This is an interesting study in art history about the differences in people's perception of forests, greenery and thickets.

I understand that today, there are nearly no natural forests left in Latvia, with the exception of Moricsala, yet most of them look very similar to natural forests. Therefore, I highly appreciate the work that you do here at the institute on a daily basis to improve the quality of our forests, providing us with suggestions on how to best manage them.

Working in science is not easy, and while the public outside of the walls of this institute sees various innovations, inventions and successes, all of these achievements are preceded by long hours of work. It is also a part of science that after years of studying something day in and day out, it must finally be concluded that there is nothing there, yet that, too, is a result which holds importance for science as a whole, and we have to appreciate it as such. Therefore, I would like to say that your work is valued by society, and science in general is among the priorities of Latvia and also a priority of my presidency. Of course, the President of Latvia does not take decisions as to the funding for science, but what the President of Latvia can do is emphasise the importance of science so that the decision-makers can better understand it.

I am also pleased to see natural regeneration taking place not only in forests, but also here at Silava. I see both young and experienced scientists here side by side. Working together as a team, a family of scientists, you are able to contribute to this area of study. This is appreciated and that appreciation is demonstrated through various awards. Among award-winning scientists I would like to note Austra Āboliņa, Imants Baumanis, Mudrīte Daugaviete, Māris Daugavietis, Valentīns Lazdāns, Arvīds Prieditis and Pēteris Zālītis. There may be more, but in any case, it is obvious that society acknowledges your work, which is of great importance.

The importance and quality of the work of the institute is also attested by its participation and involvement in various projects both with state funding, such as PostDoc Latvia and the Fundamental Applied Research Programme, and European Commission funding through the Horizon 2020 programme. This means that your work is appreciated at the national level in Latvia, as well as at European level, as this is a field of science allowing for comparability and thus also competition. This is something that is not possible within human sciences, for example, international competition within history as a scientific discipline is, in effect, impossible, however, forestry and all other natural sciences provide the option of comparability. And in terms of this comparability, Silava ranks at a very respectable level in the European scientific community.

I would like to thank you for your contribution to science and the economy of Latvia. As I mentioned, forests are of great importance for all Latvians, therefore I would also like to thank you for ensuring that our forests continue to thrive and are of high quality and practical use. Society highly appreciates your input. I wish you continued success in your scientific work, attracting projects and life in general here at this beautiful institute. Thank you!



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