

## Address of the President of Latvia, Egils Levits, to the participants of creative school competition 'Image of a modern-day Latvian hero'

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Good afternoon, friends, pupils, youngsters, ladies and gentlemen,

I am happy to welcome you to the President's place of work, the Riga Castle. Thank you for taking part in President's speech competition!

Next week I will have to make a lot of speeches and I will build upon some of your best suggestions and ideas.

It is great to see so many of you here. It means that new generation of young people, independent thinkers who have showed interest in politics early on in their life, will one day be ready to successfully and confidently step into position of current politicians. Young people capable of thinking beyond themselves and their family, thinking on a level of friends, school and even the whole society. It means that you, my friends, are already thinking on a national level.

This competition is intended to encourage pupils and youngsters to be civically responsible and engaged in national agenda, to think about the role and skills required to be a President of Latvia. I am looking forward to a discussion with you after the ceremony. We will discuss my vision and your understanding of what this role and skills involve.

One of the basic requirements for a President is to be active. No democracy can exist without active citizens. Democracy, which is also our political system as you know, is not guaranteed. We must constantly nurture, defend and strengthen it. It is the duty of all Latvian citizens.

How do we do it? One day you will join a political party, and do not listen to those who claim political parties are bad. Political

groups are essential to democracy. If you do not like the existing parties, create your own. If you are not happy with how our country is run, do not turn your back on politics and parties. Join a party, change its doctrine, or create a new party. Create a politically active group of like-minded people. It is perfectly normal, acceptable and even necessary to think about politics.

By following and showing interest in political and government processes, you can be active outside political parties. Instead of just clicking on Like (thumbs up) and Heart buttons on social media pages, which is good but hardly enough, you can actively pursue your goals and express opinions for the common good of all people, not just some.

By participating in President's speech competition, you have clearly showed that you are willing to do more than average citizen. If you look around, you will see a lot of average citizen who do not think that way. You have already surpassed them. Thank you for being open and sensitive to your surroundings and more global processes! The ability to see beyond your four walls, school or circle of friends is critical for thinking on a national level.

To think nationally, you need to have informed opinions, be able to perceive and understand day-to-day life and struggles. Your speeches radiate deep insight. That is very good and important.

You have described and defined features of modern-day heroes that our ancestors had a hundred years ago when they won the right to create the Latvian state. This victory was made by heroes. However, everyday life may also be heroic if it constantly requires pushing yourself to the limit. You have captured that too. You have highlighted the heroism of those who take care of seriously ill, teachers who devote themselves to their work and others who aspire for more than average people do. Average is a benchmark. To become a hero, you need to go above that. Each age has its challenges and scale, and its own heroes, as well.

If you think nationally, you can identify problems and find ways of solving them so that the whole society benefits. To be able to do that, you need the breadth of vision and good education, critical thinking and logic, ability to formulate your own thoughts coherently and use language to clearly and intelligently communicate them. I am very happy that you have emphasised the value of Latvian language and used the Latvian in your speeches with such eloquence, so fluently and correctly.

President of the state is the common denominator of the nation and the whole society. President must be able to recognise, express and define the common goals of the society, as well as inspire and encourage citizens and politicians to meet and achieve those goals.

I would like to conclude by thanking you once again for deciding to take part in the competition. Maybe, we even have the next President of Latvia among us today. One of you who, dear youngsters, will one day become the President of Latvia and thus also become a colleague of mine.

May all your goals and dreams come true! Congratulations on the approaching national holidays – the Lāčplēsis Day and 101st Anniversary of the Proclamation of the Republic of Latvia.

Competition winners who will read their President's speech at the concert honouring the 101st Anniversary of the Republic of Latvia hosted by the President of Latvia on 18 November at the Latvian National Theatre:

5th – 6th year:

Aleksandra Alferenkova (Jaunmārupe Primary School)

7th – 9th year:

Antra Troporkova (Cibla Secondary School)

10th – 12th year:

Matiss Kataņenko (Āgenskalns State Gymnasium)



School competition: 'put on a hat' of the President of Latvia, write your own presidential address for Latvia's 101st anniversary!

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