

## President of Latvia: administrative and territorial reform should strengthen people's sense of belonging to Latvia

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On 6 November, the President of Latvia Egils Levits met with Latvian Association of Local and Regional Governments council members in the Riga Castle to discuss the implementation of administrative and territorial (regional) reform and hear the position of municipal leaders on the reform to promote more rational and informed discussion on further reform process.

President Levits stressed that implementation of the regional reform should focus on three key elements – scope of competence, borders of territories and identity.

In the context of levels of responsibility and accessibility, scope of competence is linked to efficiency and quality. According to the President, there is a need to move into a more detailed analysis of scope of competence in further stages of implementation of the reform.

President Levits urged for greater involvement of local communities in setting the borders of territorial units to factor in the habits of people. Egils Levits emphasised the strong link between the reform and sense of belonging and identity. Reform should not weaken communities that have historically evolved across Latvia. It should rather strengthen local communities as a way of promoting people's sense of belonging to Latvia.

Egils Levits also pointed out that all settlements are equally important, therefore, regional reform should promote solidarity and cooperation between cities, regions and districts because there are a lot of services and projects that can have greater impact and efficiency when delivered through collaborative platforms.

President Levits suggested that the next phase of the legislative initiative should encompass a broad and structured discussion between line ministries, Saeima (Parliament), municipal representatives. This would ensure the broadest possible stakeholder support for the new legislation. Egils Levits also urged to pay closer focus on awareness-raising because quite often differences on various issues stem from lack of knowledge.

Meeting at the Riga Castle was attended by most Latvian municipal leaders who shared their views on the current progress with the regional reform and raised their concerns about public involvement, democratic principles of decision-making process, quality criteria, lack of analysis and clear justification.



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