

Administrative and territorial reform and Latvia's contribution to climate change issues are discussed in the Riga Castle

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President of Latvia Egils Levits met with Minister of Environmental Protection and Regional Development (MEPRD) Juris Pūce to discuss a wide range of topics, including progress of administrative and territorial reform, agenda of Latvia's digital policy, and government priorities on environmental health and climate change in the Riga Castle.

During the discussion on the administrative and territorial reform, the President of Latvia underlined that he saw an opportunity to ensure the quality of services in the regions and to preserve the identity, belonging, and cultural and historical significance of different places in Latvia at the same time. In the opinion of the President of Latvia, the possibility to decide on their local affairs in small locations of Latvia in terms of population is crucial, but with the delegation of the functions to a higher municipal governance where guaranteeing high-quality service is impossible and broader regional cross-border overall view is required.

Mr Pūce informed Mr Levits of the progress of his discussions on the administrative and territorial reform with 114 local governments in 30 locations in Latvia by discussing the arguments and current issues of the reform with the representatives of local governments. One plans to launch a public consultation of MEPRD with the Latvian population on the planned reform.

During the meeting, the President of Latvia also discussed the need to discuss the possibility of starting out-of-party people in local elections within so-called election associations with political parties in the future. Both officials touched on the international experience of allowing electoral associations to engage in local elections briefly.

During the meeting, Mr Pūce introduced the President of Latvia to the activity of MEPRD on a new Law on Local Governments, which will also include a separate chapter about the capital of the country. MEPRD plans to submit the draft law to the Saeima in the second half of 2020.

When speaking about the current developments in Latvia's digital policy, the Minister emphasised the started work on a unified standard-based approach to digital solutions in e-governance, thus promoting data compatibility and a strategic approach to digital needs in the future.

While turning to environmental issues, Mr Pūce noted that the State Environmental Service should be further strengthened to help it become a modern supervisory authority to deal with current environmental issues efficiently. The Minister also informed about the anticipated measures to reduce air pollution.

Both officials welcomed the fact that Latvia was among the EU Member States then, which were ready for decisive policies in view of climate change. Mr Levits added that he would stress Latvia's support for the priorities of the Finnish Presidency of the EU Council on climate change during his forthcoming visit to Finland. The participants of the meetings talked about the role of Europe in the global fight against climate change and mentioned the forthcoming UN Climate Summit in September and the Santiago Summit in December as crucial global forums to highlight the issue.



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