

Solemn affirmation and speech of the President of Latvia Raimonds Vējonis at the Saeima meeting

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The Honourable Madam Speaker of the Parliament, Honourable Executive Council, Honourable Members of Parliament, Excellencies, Dear Latvian people, Ladies and Gentlemen, Little more than twenty-five years ago, on 4 May 1990, representatives freely elected by the people opted for restoration of Latvian independence in the same hall. Then we all together stated clearly and boldly that we wished to decide on our lives ourselves, to be together as a nation and as a state. The future was uncertain and insecure; cautious and sceptical voices were heard as well. However, Members of the Supreme Council decided on that important step being encouraged by the Latvian people and loudly said to the world: we were not every man for himself; we stood together shoulder to shoulder for a single objective in the name of our sovereign and democratic country.

Twenty-five years have passed since that time, and I have the honour to assume the duties of the President of Latvia today. I have thought a lot about this honourable position, on what this position embodied and what the President should do.

There are occupations where good professionals are easily segregated from the bad ones. There are explicit and well-established criteria set forth: profit in business, discoveries in science, and results in sports.

I consider that many of us present here today have wondered about criteria of success in politics on daily basis. What measurement do we use in order to evaluate results of our work? Having thought about it, I have found a clear answer for myself. Namely, the most important criterion is that you have contributed to the development of your country; that people are more prosperous, happier, more patriotic, and safer than at the moment when those obligations were assumed.

Each of us should be aware that success of Latvia depends on success of every person in Latvia. Conversely, success depends on our attitude. First of all, this attitude is pride of one's country and its people. We often forget how many great, wise, and selfless people live around us. We also often forget the fact that an achievement of each Latvian person is an achievement for our country as a whole and a reason for every patriot of Latvia to be proud. Saying that, I mean not only world-class excellence in arts, science, and sports, although they would deserve more evaluation at their own home. I mean those many persons, who do their daily work selflessly by helping others like doctors, who save lives of other people, teachers, who teach young professionals, entrepreneurs who create jobs. They all deserve our appreciation on a daily basis through positive attitude, encouragement, and acknowledgement, but not only medals and honorary signs as a proof of their work already done. Latvia and its future are relying on those people.

This is exactly the perspective, where I behold my work as the President of Latvia. I would like to encourage everyone think how Latvia will look like during the next century, what practical actions we can take so that our grandchildren would be proud to live, work and establish a family here. That is the matter that we sometimes lose the view of during daily struggles of political parties and interest groups, id est, the ability to see the most important and lasting. Important phenomena occur in wild nature in the longer term, because one cannot get an oak from an acorn in a second. However, it is important to have that acorn and create conditions for its development, and an oak will grow. Also in politics, we must be capable of decision-making in the long term.

These are decisions and reforms, whose outcome and effect will be enjoyed only by our descendants. Working on such long-sighted politics will require strong political neutrality of the President of Latvia. The President should be able to balance various interests in favour of common development of the country. That is why the President will welcome everyone, who is willing to work constructively. The President of Latvia is not only a nice signboard. He must be a practical assistant for anyone, who intends to work for the country both in the area of internal affairs and foreign affairs. We must be able to communicate humanly, adhering to the common and unifying values instead of stressing out differences excessively.

Unfortunately, one often tends to mention a “fragmented” society in Latvia. This theme is also popular among our ill-wishers in other countries. However, our own exaggeration and emphasis of that fragmentation are neither wise nor patriotic. Let us look around and we will see many things that unite us all.

There is no doubt that we must work hard on strengthening the foundations of our country so that they become self-evident for every person in Latvia. We also must work on a common understanding about the history of Latvia. However, there are no different “Latvian” and “non-Latvian” ways to plough soil or to sow crops. Our inconsistencies must be solved by means of practical, long-sighted work instead of loudly scandals and scuffles. Here politicians are often showed best practices from other areas. Latvia has no less reason for pride when exactly Mr Aleksandrs Antonenko represents us among the world’s best tenors or Mr Vjačeslavs Kaščejevs represents our country among the greatest physicists. Also a year and a half ago when a supermarket collapsed in Zolitūde district, nationality of victims and selfless rescuers did not matter at all. The most important was to save lives, lives of Latvian people. I can mention much more examples like that. Thus, let us remember that love is stronger than resentment and forgiveness is stronger than hatred.

While addressing practical things, I consider that strengthening of national security is our major task. That is a more challenging task than it might sound. At present, many people in Europe are like awakened from a long sleep. The aggressive behaviour of our neighbouring country in Ukraine shows that the military and technological safety still plays a significant role in the world. We have to prove it not only in words, but also in deeds. Of course, not only military security is important. The national security also includes safety of each Latvian resident about his or her life and future of his or her family in Latvia.

Each baby, whose parents have gone to work abroad, each retired person, whose children are earning money to pay off the loan in another country, every young person, who dreams to go for work abroad already in high school is a small gap in our national security.

To make us more secure in economic terms, we do not need to reinvent the bicycle. We just have to take care that our work would be more productive, that we would attract investments, that we would create well-paid jobs. We should use and develop those factors skilfully that will ensure the development of Latvia both in short term and long term, by paying deference to fabulously beautiful Latvian nature and ensuring preservation of this unique treasure.

We must achieve all together that no one would find a variety of skewed and populist ideas circulated by ill-wishers attractive in Latvia. For example, that integration of Latvia in the Western world and economics has been unsuccessful, that we are treated badly, that other scenarios and perspectives in the East are much more attractive. Everyone should be aware that security and prosperity in Latvia would be provided by further and deeper cooperation with our partners in the EU and NATO. To that end, Latvia must demonstrate kindness and solidarity to other countries, and learn defending its interests better and more effectively, that has not always been successful.

Our business community requires security as well. So far, we have sometimes unwittingly set our most ambitious people against the state, by changing tax rates frequently, assuming the rules and laws that are difficult to understand. I will stand against such a practice as the President of Latvia. Public governance must act in an understandable and predictable manner. Every movement and change it makes shall be considered and assessed in cooperation with the social partners.

I invite us to reflect every time that perhaps a decision made spontaneously by politicians today will jeopardize existence of an enterprise, which provides jobs and income for many families. State administration should not act in isolation from the economic life, interests of people must be respected who not only pay taxes and create new jobs, but also give us the reason to be proud of our country. After all, fantastic products are invented and produced in Latvia that are competitive in many markets of the world. These all are companies that should be protected and developed, rather than intimidated with tax changes and new bureaucratic requirements.

Finally, security means national social responsibility as well. We must notice each individual person, their life span, and needs behind financial tables and budgetary discipline. In particular, we must think about the most vulnerable groups in Latvia today that is retired persons, young families with children, and people with special needs.

We should show by our deeds that we need those people and that we are ready to care for them jointly as a country and as a nation even if it would mean for somebody to give up a new luxury car or another mansion.

Regional dimension is also important for reducing inequality. All Latvian regions are equally belonging to it, and they deserve equal attention and support. As it regards many other topics, I think that we will face serious negotiations on regional development as well. I consider establishing a platform for fundamental discussions that lead to practical changes to be my duty as the President of Latvia.

Sometimes with regard to priorities of the President's work people ask whether he will be more "domestic policy" or "foreign policy" oriented. My answer is short: I do not intend to separate my activity in internal and external policy. Whichever area I will be acting as President, it always will be led by the main task – strengthening the Latvian state and its security. I look forward to good cooperation with all political forces in Latvia as far as they are willing to work for Latvia, and I will always follow the principle that peace nourishes, but unrest destroys. At the same time, I will use all and every powers conferred to me by the Latvian Constitution to promote prosperity of Latvia and its people. One of the most important tasks of the President in the coming years will be assisting to overcome the "entrenchment mentality" that often reigns in our politics and society. Due to daily contradictions and disputes, we have lost the ability to rejoice about common values. For sure, we have had to overcome serious difficulties in recent years and there are many reasons for bitterness as well.

Yet, we will be able to go ahead only if we all are proud of Latvia and accomplishments of its people both at home and elsewhere in the world. We must take the liberty to encourage a person, who starts to do some new and unprecedented task. We will not be shy to rejoice when someone from Latvia reaches the top of global arts or science. We shall appreciate the fact that Latvian scientists and doctors succeed in unique and complex undertakings. These persons are our own people. Moreover, who else should be happy for them, who should encourage them instead of us here in Latvia? Let us not forget that there is still a fertile ground for outstanding talents, ideas, and innovation in Latvia apart from all the deficiencies and problems. We have many talented people, who are popularizing our country in the world every day. For us they all are our own people, and their success is our success, Latvian success.

Latvian prosperity in tangible and spiritual sense shall not be sought in disputes and envy. On the contrary, it is found in success stories common for all that would give us new confidence in our own abilities. Each Latvian person, who achieves something positive, affirms to us every day that great things are done right here, that exactly Latvian people with their education, diligence and talent are welcomed and appreciated in the world. People, who produce world-class technology in our country, who conquer the best sporting-clubs and opera houses in the world, are the pride and encouragement to us all.

In its turn, such pride is the main source for our patriotism and national self-confidence. Therefore, I wish to say proudly that I am proud to live in Latvia! I am proud of my country and all Latvian people!

God bless Latvia and its people!

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