

Andra Levite and President of Italian Paralympic Committee discuss athletic equality

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Today, in Rome, Andra Levite, who is accompanying the President of Latvia Egils Levits on an official visit to Italy and fulfils the role of Patroness of Paralympic Movement in Latvia, met with the President of Italian Paralympic Committee Luca Pancalli to discuss the conditions in which Latvian and Italian Paralympians train, importance of inclusive society and preparations of Italian and Latvian national Paralympic teams for this summer's games in Tokyo.

According to Luca Pancalli, Italian Paralympic Committee is more than just an organisation. It is more of a public movement promoting the concept of equality in sports. One of the main long-term focuses of Italian Paralympic Committee has been on showing that Paralympians are also top professionals. Organisation has poured significant efforts into creating media and public understanding that all athletes are equal, irrespective of whether they have or do not have any special needs. Mrs Levite echoed the importance of promoting public awareness on athletic equality and healthy lifestyle: 'Young or old, with or without special needs, we all need to move and work out to have a healthy life'.

Luca Pancalli praised Italy for succeeding in changing public attitudes, which has resulted in Paralympic games being broadcast live on Italian media, just like Olympic games, and more and more athletes being offered endorsement deals by private sponsors. One of Committee's current priorities is post-retirement support for Paralympians.

Andra Levite was eager to learn more about the work of Paralympic Sports Centre opened three years ago in Italy. Mrs Levite asked Mr Pancalli to tell more about the history and challenges in such construction project, an endeavour upon which Latvia only plans to embark. Like Italy, Latvia plans to build a Paralympic Sports Centre open for athletes that have no special needs because its social inclusion policy does not discriminate athletes based on their abilities.

Before going to Italy, Mrs Levite met with National Paralympic Committee in Riga to discuss the current priorities of Latvian

Paralympic organisations and potential cooperation with Italian counterparts.

While in Rome, Andra Levite also visited the oldest public library in Europe today, the *Biblioteca Angelica*. Medical literature, of course, was of particular interest to the First Lady. She also met with diaspora and discussed their activities in Italy.

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