

# Address of the President of Latvia, Egils Levits, at the launch of '500 years of book publishing in Latvia' event series

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[Latviešu grāmatai 500](#)



Dear librarians, publishers, creative workers and book enthusiasts,

Today National Library of Latvia is embarking on a journey tracing back 500 years since first book published in Latvian. A journey towards deeper self-awareness and self-exploration. 500 years of our national introspection. I am confident that it will be a truly exciting journey, full of wonderful discoveries, long-forgotten wisdom and many new-found realisations about how interconnected everything is.

The first book in Latvian published almost 500 years ago symbolically made us a member of the European language family and part of Europe's intellectual landscape. Translated books were our primary source of knowledge and enlightenment until then. They were a vital source of knowledge on many everyday issues.

Enormous amounts of translated literature, mostly translated by German monks, were essential for development of Latvian language. Young Latvians were a 19<sup>th</sup>-century movement that propelled word-formation and concept-building to a new level when it comes to Latvian language. Rainis followed in their footpath. Latvian continues to constantly evolve today as we work on best semantic representation of 21<sup>st</sup>-century realia.

Turning interpretation or understanding into a meaningful denomination to describe a grand concept requires ability to find the right word. 500 years of book publishing is the reflection of the development of our language and intellectual thought. It reflects five centuries of concept-building.

Latvian publishing and press industry, which will celebrate its 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary next year, has shaped information and conceptual environment for centuries, giving Latvians the right words for communicating. Shared language or conversations are the glue that keeps society together. Centuries of conversations in the same language make people and societies closer as community, people,

nation.

Printed word has had enormous importance for self-awareness of Latvians, which Jānis Čakste described as affiliation with 'one nation'.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Publishing, and press, deeply rooted in education, science, evolution of intellectual thought, have ensured sustainable development of Western democracies for ages.

Fundamental democratic values that we took for granted are subjected to unprecedented attacks today. Reinforced by unprecedented wave of 'junk news' that has flooded our information space and transformation of printed media.

That is why we are so happy about National Library's attempts to remind everyone of the cultural importance of book publishing and celebrations of the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the first printed book in Latvian with several years of various projects. I hope these celebrations will permeate the intellectual life of Latvia for years to come! I urge all cultural actors and memory institutions to join the National Library in various events throughout years leading up to 500-year anniversary.

Going back in 500-year history will give us a clearer understanding and awareness of who we are. An essential knowledge that can help you avoid the trappings and false promises of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Congratulations to everyone on the launch of first Latvian book's 500-year celebration programme and exhibition devoted to the oldest existing book in Latvian, as well as first catalogue of Riga Jesuit College book collection!

Thank you, dear book lovers, and everyone who finds it impossible to live without books and supports our common cause of revealing more about the 500-year-old history of book publishing in Latvia and our common past!

<https://www.president.lv/en/article/address-president-latvia-egils-levits-launch-500-years-book-publishing-latvia-event-series>