

Speech by the President Egils Levits at the discussion dedicated to the Official Language Day at the Riga Castle

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[Egils Levits](#)



Distinguished participants, dear online viewers, welcome!

I

The Latvian language is the foundation of the identity of the Latvian nation. The Latvian nation, and later the Latvian state, were forged by consolidating around our language and culture. Therefore, one of the constitutional cornerstones of Latvian statehood is the status of the Latvian language as the official language.

II

This year, on October 15, we celebrated the Official Language Day for the second time. It is a reminder of our common responsibility as well as a valuable opportunity to reflect on what has been done and what lies ahead.

The traditions of the Official Language Day are still emerging. The essence of the tradition is to enable people to appreciate and feel the sense of belonging to our environment and grow into this environment.

Every person, institution and organisation can find its own way and form through which to improve, represent and, if necessary, defend and promote the Latvian language.

However, it is not enough to focus on our language only once a year. The state and society have a duty - as stipulated in the Constitution - to constantly strengthen the national identity of the Latvian State. We do this by speaking Latvian, reading and writing in Latvian every day – by constantly embracing the Latvian language.

Using the Latvian language, we recognise ourselves as Latvians and express our identity, which we celebrate on the Official

Language Day.

III

Two years ago, here at Riga Castle, we discussed how to strengthen the status of official language in modern-day Latvia with linguists, education professionals and civil society representatives.

The most painful and long-standing problems were identified - insufficient quality of the Latvian language learning and knowledge resources, segregation of schools, inconsistencies in official language policy, and discrimination against Latvians on the labour market, in terms of unreasonable demands for Russian language proficiency.

These challenges have long prevented the Latvian language from taking its rightful place and role in all spheres of life in our country.

IV

Over the past two years, however, *the ice has been broken*. A number of far-sighted political decisions have been taken.

For example, the Official Language Policy Guidelines for 2021-2027 have been significantly improved, reinforcing the constitutional significance of the official language as required by the Constitution.

A law on unified general education in the official language has been adopted in order to eliminate segregation and ensure that all Latvian children will now be educated in a uniform school system.

V

Russia's aggression in Ukraine has forced society to awaken from a passive tolerance of the Soviet colonial legacy, which was already bordering on cowardice. Society has become more engaged and mobilised.

The public campaign to eradicate the dishonourable Soviet colonial legacy in our free and democratic country was started by a few like-minded people online, but has now spread massively.

It calls for a swift and decisive riddance of the remnants of the Soviet occupation in the information space, including the use of the Russian language in public communication with or among Latvians.

It has drawn attention to our public domain, where monuments, street names and other public signs honoured the Soviet regime, Russian imperialism, their representatives and henchmen.

The main symbol of occupation in Riga has already been demolished, and the remaining ones will soon be dismantled.

A draft law on renaming streets and other names glorifying the Soviet regime was submitted to the Saeima by social activists.



<https://www.president.lv/en/article/speech-president-egils-levits-discussion-dedicated-official-language-day-riga-castle>