

# Address by the President of Latvia, Egils Levits, at the closing of the Portugal–Latvia Business Forum

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Egils Levits



Dear President Marcel Rebelo de Sousa,

Dear Secretary of State and Minister,

Dear entrepreneurs,

It is my pleasure to be here today and address you at the closing of the Portugal–Latvia Business Forum. I sincerely hope that this has been an informative event, and everyone here discovered something new, which will help to advance economic cooperation between Latvia and Portugal.

Geographically it might seem that we are located in different corners of Europe, but I suspect we might share more in common than we think.

In fact, we are so far from each other that we have nothing to compete for but everything to be complimentary and to cooperate for.

Firstly, both Latvia and Portugal recognize that innovation and technology will be important drivers of our economic growth in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. As smaller EU nations we can agree that an excellent education system and scientific achievements will give the needed competitive advantage in the new global economy.

Among the participants today are quite a few ICT companies. Latvia and Portugal both have growing IT industries and startup cultures. We are developing solutions for smarter cities, more efficient and green mobility, cybersecurity, and other industries.

By sharing knowledge and best practices today, we can create new solutions tomorrow. I hope that today our Minister of

Environmental Protection and Regional Development, Mr Māris Sprindžuks, discussed Latvia's digital transformation story, and this will give ideas for the Portuguese and Latvian businesses to collaborate.

We also share common economic policy goals, like climate neutrality and the European green transition, which should speed up renewable technologies and stop the use of fossil fuels. Due to Russia's aggressive war in Ukraine, this is also a security matter, as much as the climate emergency.

Portugal is harnessing offshore and onshore wind energy and here it is a major source of electricity. Meanwhile, in Latvia our green source for electricity production is the three hydropower stations.

We are both making our contributions towards faster transition to renewable energy use in Europe yet, we both need to do more and collaborate on developing new technologies, like green hydrogen.

For example, we are looking at ways to advance the science of green hydrogen energy storage.

Meanwhile, Latvia's 'Green and Smart technology cluster' together with 43 other partners from the other two Baltic countries, Finland, Poland, Germany, Denmark, Sweden, France and Norway is launching a five-year project 'BalticSeaH2' with the aim of creating the first and the largest transnational hydrogen ecosystem in the region. This is a *Horizon Europe* project.

Moreover, Latvia and Portugal have well-developed life sciences and biomedicine sectors with focus on the research and development. More cooperation could help us to accelerate progress, for example, in the fight against cancer.

I am very glad that during my visit to Portugal I will witness the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding between the *Champalimaud Fundacao* and the three Latvian science institutions: *Pauls Stradiņš Clinical University Hospital*, *Riga Stradiņš University* and *Riga Technical University*.

The agreement foresees cooperation by developing innovative technologies and paradigms in the field of breast cancer. It may initiate a new surgical era: the so-called surgical metaverse. This will be our common contribution towards diminishing country borders in the fight against breast cancer and perform breast cancer operations together, from Riga and Lisbon.

Finally, I will mention another common interest for both our countries and that is tourism. Portugal is a popular tourist destination for its sunny beaches, historic cities and delicious cuisine. Conversely, Latvia and its historic capital Riga, can offer a respite from the hot Portuguese summers and to experience a unique North European culture in Latvia. There are sandy beaches and beautiful pine tree forests stretching almost 500 km along the Baltic Sea coast. The Portuguese wine might be especially tasty with the Baltic Sea sunsets.

Regardless of many kilometres, it is easy to reach Latvia with direct flights from Lisbon and Porto, which are carried out by airBaltic – Latvia's national airline. Very soon our countries will be connected by another mode of transportation – the train. By 2030 we should finish building *Rail Baltica* fast-speed railway project, which will link the three Baltic states with Berlin and onwards.

Latvians and Portuguese do share a lot in common and I hope this is the feeling, which you will have after today's business meeting! I hope to see you in Latvia soon!

<https://www.president.lv/en/article/address-president-latvia-egils-levits-closing-portugal-latvia-business-forum>