

President of Latvia: the UN Sustainable development goals are not politically prioritised

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On 8 June, President of Latvia Egils Levits met with Auditor General Rolands Irklis to discuss the audit conducted by the State Audit Office (SAO) on Latvia's progress in achieving the UN Sustainable development goals. The two officials also discussed the current SAO audit on food procurement by the National Armed Forces.

The President of Latvia pointed out that the findings of the food procurement audit indicate significant errors in the administrative system of the Ministry of Defence. "During the planning and organisation of the procurement, there was no preventive monitoring of the process, which could have signalled irregularities or non-compliance of the procurement with the needs of the National Armed Forces, the interests of the defence department and national security. The Ministry of Defence should assess both the structural and individual consistencies needed here," emphasised E. Levits.

Discussing the SAO's assessment of Latvia's progress in achieving the UN Sustainable development goals, the President of Latvia noted that compliance with the UN Sustainable development goals is a matter of the country's reputation, as well as good governance.

Latvia is already successfully implementing the UN Sustainable development goals in many areas, but they are not linked to Latvia's development goals and strategy. "The National Development Plan, for example, does not show specific work to be done and there is no link to budget planning, which would indicate the SDGs as a political priority," said E. Levits. According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), Latvia will have achieved only 30 or 18% of the 169 sub-goals by 2030 if it does nothing to change its current practices.

The SAO report points out that there is no political responsibility for achieving the UN SDGs. "Currently, the implementation of the UN SDGs is left to its own devices. Local authorities also implement them in their development plans on their own initiative.

There is a need to sort out governance in this area. This is the responsibility of the Prime Minister, and the State Chancellery," President of Latvia E. Levits noted.

Auditor General R. Irklis also pointed out that the public discussion organised by the SAO on "UN Sustainable development goals - how to "land" them in Latvia and use them in a forward-looking way?" had created a wide resonance among sustainability experts and enthusiasts and confirmed that these issues are currently too low on the political agenda. We are moving towards our goals in an uncoordinated way, which is largely due to the fact that public goals and public money "have a life of their own" or insufficient linkage between budget and development planning documents, as also pointed out by the SAO in a number of other audits.

E. Levits and Irklis agreed that in order for Latvia to move more successfully towards achieving the UN Sustainable development goals, the active involvement of population is also essential. We should promote citizens' involvement and awareness both through more active support from local authorities and NGOs. The SAO report identifies examples of good practice, including in Latvian municipalities.



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