

## President of Latvia unveils the environmental art object 'Gates of Light' in Sunākste

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On 9 September, President of Latvia Edgars Rinkēvičs attended the unveiling of sculptor Ojārs Arvīds Feldbergs environmental art object 'Gates of Light' at Sunākste to commemorate the Latvian academic Jānis Stradiņš (1933–2019). Sculptural ensemble is also a tribute to Renaissance Baltic German theologian, writer and linguist Gotthard Friedrich Stender (Old Stender).

'Paths of family of German priest Stender and true Selonians Stradiņi first crossed right here several centuries ago. This is the place from where academic Jānis Stradiņš began to carry the torch of Renaissance first ignited by Old Stender, a symbolic mission he proudly carried out throughout his dazzling intellectual life.

Blessed by this calling, academic accepted the invitation of numerous Selonians and became the informal leader of Selonian movement not long after the regaining of Latvia's independence. Stradiņš started to attend Selonian gatherings and became the first to propose Selonia as a unique cultural and historical region of our dear Latvia.

He presented the idea of Selonian flag and initiated a line of publications and research on the subject. Unification of scattered Selonians gradually grew into a new initiative of higher scale, the Selonian Year. Initiative that attracted local municipalities and Academy of Science. More and more articles and books were released. It took years of scrupulous gradual effort to consolidate and also highlight the diversity of Selonia as a cultural and historical region. To identify, first of all, the geographic area inhabited by ancient Selonian tribes. Secondly, identify the particular area with its specific linguistic characteristics. Thirdly, describe its ethnographic features. The great academic showed everyone that there are two distinct Selonias: one nurtured by local enthusiasts and ethnographers in Riga and elsewhere. The ideal image of Selonia. And the other Selonia. The one that is inhabited by people who are facing economic challenges on daily basis, with bad roads and often lack of opportunities,' President Rinkēvičs said in his address to participants.

'Challenges identified by Stradiņš are still relevant today, even though the great academic is long gone. But there is good news, as well. Selonian revival initiated by the great Latvian academic has become a real movement and has changed things for good. Although Selonian heritage is confined to three main regions, Aizkraukle, Jēkabpils and Augšdaugava, the Latvian Historical Lands Law adopted in 2021 has elevated Selonia as one of Latvia's distinct cultural and historical regions to the same level as four other Latvian historical lands.

Local communities of Selonia have been particularly active in recent years. Both on public media and other mass media, where they actively promoted the Selonian heritage. For the first time in Latvia's history, we have particular state-funded projects covering the whole geographic area of Selonia. We are currently standing in front of very moving stone sculpture ensemble. The ambitious project of Path of Light that was developed over the past 5 years. The idea that came after the demise of academic Jānis Stradiņš and has been implemented to mark his ninetieth birthday.

Pēteris, the son of Jānis Stradiņš, is the driving force behind this, dare I say, fantastic achievement. He is the engine that got many others roaring and moving. Sculptor Ojārs Arvīds Feldbergs and architect Mikus Lejnieks made the idea, the philosophic embodiment of Renaissance as moving force that defies all inertia, and dare I say also the stagnation, a reality. Right here, at Sunākste, Selonia.

Selonian flag and coat of arms are yet to be officially endorsed, but Gate of Light is already here. The four parts of the stone sculpture we see here, the ancient stone, is a symbolic depiction of crossroads. The road to knowledge. The road to self-awareness. The road to awareness and growth of this cultural and historical identity of the local community that is often filled with contradiction and other obstacles that bring us to this fork.

And there is simple granite column in the middle of these majestic stone pylons. It stands tall, ignorant of any styles and fashions, like no other, like no capital that symbolises its age. It is like Absolute Truth. Absolute Wisdom that we strive to achieve no matter where our road leads us.

It is the proud and wise Latvia. The kind of statehood Jānis Stradiņš advocated throughout his rich creative life, reminding constantly that we need to strive for enlightenment and pure knowledge. Statehood that is only as strong and sustainable as its nation that constantly strives for new knowledge, creating and supporting its own unique culture. Statehood that reflects nation's conscious choice to build its future through its unique culture

Just like our planet constantly circling the Sun, this sculptural ensemble, its idea and physical form, although powerful, but so seemingly static and reserved, symbolises the idea of *perpetuum mobile*. The sculptural ensemble Gates of Light has given a unique wisdom to this place seemingly out of blue.

Symbolic ray of enlightenment now illuminated the historical land of Selonia, illuminating Latvia from southeast. I hope this piece of art, which urges you to continue nurturing Selonian land with confidence and head held proud, will help you bring the name of Selonia and Latvia to the world,' President said to those gathered.





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