

Address by the President of Latvia, Edgars Rinkēvičs, at the concert marking the 105th anniversary of the Proclamation of the Republic of Latvia at the Latvian National Theatre

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Dear Madam Speaker of the Saeima!

Dear Madam Prime Minister!

Ladies and gentlemen!

Dear viewers and listeners!

Dear people of Latvia!

It is a great pleasure for me to address you on the most important day of the year. On the day we celebrate our country. The 105th anniversary of our country. 18 November is not just a holiday, but a day of celebration. We each celebrate as we see fit. In one family it is a festive dinner. Others go hiking in the Latvian forests or along the beautiful Latvian seaside. Some celebrate by quietly commemorating the defenders of Latvia who have fallen for our freedom. And I think that our ancestors, who gave their lives and their dreams for Latvia, would be happy to see us celebrating. Because this is a day of celebration.

35 years ago, The Popular Front of Latvia was founded. It opened the floodgates for Latvia's pursuit of independence. This year marks 30 years since the Constitution was fully restored, the 5th Saeima and the President of Latvia were elected, and the Cabinet of Ministers was established. All this would not have happened if the independence of the Latvian State had not been proclaimed 105 years ago.

Latvia is a wonderful and remarkably diverse country.

Our Baltic Sea is of indescribable beauty. The sea can take on many faces – from the quiet, frozen shore in January to a violent thunderstorm with huge rain drops at the end of a hot day.

The same can be set for our green and luscious forest – where we pick mushrooms in early September morning or search for snowdrops in early spring. These are different.

And finally, the seemingly endless darkness of winter and the light nights of summer. These are the many faces of our Latvia. But it is still one whole. Latvia is unique and special to each of us individually and together.

Of course, we have our differences – we passionately argue over the spelling of 'rasols' or 'rosols'. Yet moments later we will stand together to help out a fellow person in need whose house has been destroyed by a storm. It wouldn't surprise me at all if our hockey and basketball teams were also arguing about the right recipe for sprat tartlets in the locker rooms. But when you go out on the pitch, you show the world your spirit and determination. Because Latvia is united.

Actor Ēvalds Valters says: "We are a small nation, a tiny handful. But it is a handful of grain, not of husks. That is what we Latvians should remember." Exactly.

And every tiny grain can create something big and lasting. No matter where in the world it lands. Wherever it has found fertile soil. Because Latvia is whole.

As I think about today and what I could say to you, I look at what my predecessors have said.

After all, it is interesting for me as a historian.

"We have great, important tasks to perform, both in the internal and external life of the country. Let this sense of great work and duty reduce the discord and strife in the internal life of the country between citizens and between political parties. Let unity, enterprise, courage and honourable work protect us in times of danger, and accompany the Latvian people in all their ways." That is the end of the quote.

These words were once said by Gustavs Zemgals on 18 November 1928, the 10th anniversary of the proclamation of independence of Latvia. And it seems that nothing has changed, but, in truth, everything has changed.

A country is like a home. It is not always perfect here. But there is nothing like home. Latvia is our home. It needs to be kept in good order all the time. The floors need to be swept. The dishes need to be washed. The sink must be repaired. Each person in the house has to do their little bit to keep it all together. There is not always enough time and energy for everything. But we try anyway. Because we know that no one else will do it for us. But we want to live in a beautiful, tidy, comfortable environment. We've been planning to buy curtains for years, but it has not still happened. Next year – for sure!

The neighbourhood is not ideal either. There are also the one or two neighbours who are a nuisance to everyone. They are abusive, they attack, in a word, they terrorise. But they're there - what can you do. You have to lock the door at night. An alarm must be installed. And stick together with those neighbours we share the road with. And above all, don't be intimidated. The more clearly that vicious neighbour can see that we are not scared, the less sense it will make to come to our door.

Ladies and gentlemen!

There is no one right profession that counts as worthwhile and good. There is no single definition of patriotism. There is no one right way to prove your love of Fatherland. But I think it is important not just to talk about patriotism, but to show it in deeds. We cannot teach our children theoretically that they should love Latvia. We have to practice it. I hope that tonight it will be heard and shown. Tonight, at the festive concert, we will experience the language of our creative Latvian people, composers and musicians.

Tonight, you will also hear three wonderful young people declare their love for Latvia in their presidential address. I believe that I

also will learn something from these speeches.

Dear people of Latvia!

I wish that in our daily lives we will be as united for our dear Latvia!

Only together we can make Latvia strong, just and safe. Only together as one nation we are a source of strength and we are able to build our dear Latvia.

I sincerely congratulate you on the 105th birthday of our country!

God bless Latvia!



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