

Address by the President of Latvia Edgars Rinkēvičs at the closing plenary of the spring session of the Saeima

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Madam Speaker of the Saeima!

Madam Prime Minister!

Distinguished members of the Saeima!

A year ago, in my inaugural address as President of the Republic of Latvia, I outlined my priorities – security, economic development and competitiveness, education and the youth of Latvia, because all our work aimed at a better future. Our young people are our future.

You have also spent extensive time discussing, assessing, and reflecting, accomplishing a great deal. But another question deserves to be asked—how many ideas have been fully realized?

Ladies and Gentlemen!

Significant progress has been achieved in the field of defence. Clear and sustainable financing has been made available, the State Defence Service has been launched, and work continues on the construction of the eastern border. Processes have been initiated. Nevertheless, there is still so much to be done, and it must be done quickly. However, the slow pace of development of the civil protection system, alongside numerous other issues, suggests that we have fallen asleep. And that the threat posed by Russia is just a dream soon to be forgotten the moment we wake up. In order to avoid a real nightmare, however, we must work urgently to provide adequate working conditions and remuneration for police officers, firefighters, rescue workers, border guards and security services officers. The courts must use the powers granted to them by the legislature to demonstrate that Latvia does not tolerate risks to its national security and that the crimes against national security are prosecuted appropriately. It is

critical that plans and exercises are up to date. People demand security today. The only way to ensure that neither the Saeima nor the public are forced to return to this issue repeatedly is to tackle and resolve it.

Honourable members of the Saeima!

People will protect their homes, their Latvia, if they see the purpose. If they have a sense of belonging, if they feel that they are needed. If they see that Latvia is their – ours – country, where they can grow up, study, work, raise a family and enjoy a peaceful retirement. People will not fight to protect policy plans, master plans, strategies, ecosystem models, well-being assessments, human capital development reports and other similar documents. People are in search of tangible economic improvement and real opportunities.

If we continue every day to bemoan our lack of productivity, our lack of access to bank loans are our overall lack of success, then nothing good will come of it. For this reason, I am very supportive of the Saeima initiative to organise debates on economic issues. We have formulated plans and ideas, we have something to say. We have more than enough at our disposal to achieve ambitious goals. Now, all that is left is the minor task of actually doing it.

If businesses are suffocated by lengthy and exhausting bureaucratic processes, let's change them. In our discussions with relevant stakeholders, let's engage them on substance, rather than by referencing Cabinet regulations, legal amendments, or lines of poetry. We must communicate openly, honestly and respectfully. Even with our opponents. We must consider ideas, not political affiliations. If that requires a WhatsApp or Signal group, let's create one. We must continue to talk with each other. Changes are the result of the agreement. Agreements are forged through a willingness to relinquish one's personal preferences in favour of a collective good.

Esteemed members of the Saeima!

Today, I would like to thank you for your cooperation and support for my legislative initiatives. I will be returning to a number of issues in the autumn. I have proposed an amendment to the Law on Higher Education Institutions that would facilitate the recruitment of international teaching staff. And I am not willing to tolerate violence in schools – in this regard, I believe the Education Law offers a number of potential solutions. Let us discuss them and agree on the most effective course of action as soon as possible.

Children cannot wait for change. We cannot postpone solving these issues until they are no longer relevant to them. We cannot accept a shortage of teachers. We must not turn a blind eye to bullying in schools because that would be the road to instilling a sense of hopelessness from an early age. This cannot happen. Children grow up only once. They are growing up now. We must act without delay.

And it looks like on some issues we are already behind. In 2023, 27 000 young people aged 15-29 were neither in education nor employment.^[1] If it were only ten young people, you could say they are just a lazy bunch. But the figure is 27 000. Clearly, something has gone wrong.

Some are not studying because they cannot afford it. Others struggle to find a specialisation that interests them in Latvia. Some are dissatisfied with the quality of education. Others are unable to find employment due to a lack of experience. Some are actually working, but “off the books”. Some are continually hampered by unreasonable demands for Russian language skills. Others do not work for extended periods due to health issues. The reasons are varied, but there is no solution. We must find it. Young people must be the priority. We cannot address demographic issues through the provision of benefits alone. We must acknowledge the harsh reality. If young people do not see opportunities for personal and professional growth in Latvia, they will leave. And they cannot be blamed – the search for a better life is natural and understandable.

We must support today's younger generation, we must invest in today's Latvia and our future. Because happy, secure people today are the foundations of the demography of the future.

Dear members of the Saeima!

As we approach Jāņi I wish you a restful summer. In reality, however, the Saeima and the government will have to deal with a number of pressing issues. These include the range of issues related to *Rail Baltica* problems, cutting red tape, next year's national budget, tax policy, healthcare and many other issues.

For change to take place, it is not sufficient to respond to every problem by simply passing a new law or amending an existing one. If it were possible, the Common Sense Law would be the ideal solution, as it would resolve all of the issues automatically.

The driving force behind change is always a person who feels invested in the outcome. Someone who truly believes in it. A person who is ready to bring together those who are opposed and those who are not, to identify the issues, to explain the options and search for solutions. Each and every one of us has the opportunity and responsibility to be a force for change. Let us recognise and appreciate this opportunity. Let us take it one step at a time and gradually work our way up the mountain.

Thank you for your attention!

[1] Source : Official statistics portal: <https://stat.gov.lv/lv/statistikas-temas/izglitiba-kultura-zinatne/izglitibas-limenis/12199-jauniesi-kuri-nestrada-un?themeCode=IZ>



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