



LATVIJAS VALSTS PREZIDENTS

**Address by President of Latvia Raimonds Vējonis
At the last plenary meeting of the Saeima's spring session
22 June 2017**

Dear Madam Speaker of the Saeima,
Distinguished Members of the Parliament,

A year has passed since my previous speech. This should have been the year of reforms. Much has been intended and promised, but little has been actually done. We have settled down comfortably on our armchairs and taken a detached view how the government has been trying to implement tax reform, the changes so desperately necessary to the society in health care and education, and we have behaved as if they did not apply to us. We have been more involved with ourselves, but we have not made the necessary efforts to achieve what we had promised to the people.

The expectant way usual for the Saeima must be changed. The coalition parties must be more involved in managing changes and take the lead in implementing the reforms. The government needs your support and involvement in decision-making instead of being detached and criticising. People are tired of the ongoing speeches about reforms. They want to see real deeds. The population wishes to build their families and businesses in Latvia, feel secure, and not be concerned about their future.

The people of Latvia have overcome difficulties many times relying on the fact that the difficulties were worth it for building a better Latvia. We may not deceive the expectations and trust of our people!

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The most significant work done in the past year is undoubtedly related to strengthening our country's security. Targeted commitment in this

sector is an example of resolute and persistent action to implement the changes of great importance for every resident.

After I achieved as the Minister of Defence with the support of the Saeima that the law guarantees the increase of the national defence spending in line with the NATO standard, we have made a long and significant path to this day.

We have significantly improved the technical equipment and accoutrement of our national armed forces. Our defensibility and the readiness of the National Guard are greater than ever before. We are a responsible NATO partner, and we can count on the Alliance's support.

The amount of state budget funds invested in defence will reach two percent of gross domestic product next year already. We have just welcomed the troops from Canada, Albania, Italy, Poland, Slovenia, and Spain, which assist our national armed forces to assure Latvia's security.

It demonstrates solidarity and ability of the NATO to respond to new security challenges by providing efficient deterrence.

Then, three years ago, we acted and created the prerequisites so that we could be confident in the security of Latvia today. Currently, we need determined action to do the same to create good changes in the taxation system, healthcare, education and other areas significant for the development of Latvia and for its population.

Dear Members of the Parliament,

Since the first day of work, the government led by Māris Kučinskis has sought solutions for implementing the government declaration and the promises made to the population. I have supported the work of the government as much as I could. However, I have noticed that the efforts of the Cabinet of Ministers and the President of Latvia have not been sufficient. The government has lacked the support of the Saeima in achieving the common goals. I still have the feeling that we have not worked all together in the way the people of Latvia have expected.

It is clear that our people are dissatisfied with the procedure of public administration and decision-making protractedly. So that the government would succeed more in implementing the intended work, the Prime Minister should be entrusted more powers regarding the formation of the government and the implementation of the government programme. It could be achieved if the Saeima approves the Prime Minister, but the

President of Latvia appoints the ministers, which the Prime Minister has invited.

Similarly, the President of Latvia should be given the power to declare extraordinary parliamentary elections instead of simply proposing a referendum on the dissolution of the Saeima. Extending the powers in such a way requires the President of Latvia is elected by direct popular vote.

The Saeima has already been offered corresponding amendments to the Satversme. Unfortunately, the MPs have not found time for them. I urge the MPs not to delay and railroad the necessary amendments to the law in autumn already so that the people themselves could elect the President of Latvia in 2019.

Dear Members of the Saeima,

Today, amendments to the Law on Credit Institutions submitted for reconsideration are included on the agenda of the Saeima meeting today. I request the Saeima to decide on this Law once again. We may not undermine the already low trust of entrepreneurs and the public on state power by our actions and decisions.

It makes many people feel marginalised and deepens the distrust between the public and the state power.

I would like to remind you of particular proposals I submitted to the Saeima on improving the legislative process last autumn. I hope that the consideration process of amendments to the Saeima Rules of Procedure will also include my ideas that would help in improving the quality of the decisions made.

The decision-making process must be clear and transparent. Knowing and understanding your rights may not become an exclusive affair. The Saeima must provide opportunities for everyone to track down the changes to the laws in a convenient and easily accessible way. I am convinced that such an obliging attitude towards the people of Latvia will also promote wider public confidence in the legislator and the state authorities in general.

Dear Members of the Saeima,

This spring you unanimously decided to grant the citizenship of the Republic of Latvia to outstanding Mikhail Baryshnikov. "When I received an invitation to receive Latvian citizenship, my heart was trembling because it

was an opportunity to be the one among my own people instead of being a stranger.” I guess that these touching words by the world-famous ballet dancer make us reckon.

Let us think about why more than twenty-five years after the restoration of Latvia’s independence, non-citizens are still born in our free country. The children born to non-citizens also are our children. Latvia finds every child important and significant. We are strong enough not to be afraid of little children and to declare once that they are ours!

During the autumn session of the Saeima, I will come up with a legislative initiative to enable the newborn children of non-citizens in Latvia to become citizens of Latvia since the moment of their birth unless their parents choose citizenship of another existing country for their own children. I am convinced that our education system and the society are able to bring all children up as true patriots of their country, Latvia.

I urge you to support this proposal so that new non-citizens would not be created in the next centenary of Latvia. We must do our best to strengthen and consolidate our people in Latvia.

Dear Colleagues,

This year and the next year are the periods of elections. We just elected new councils of municipalities and we will elect the thirteenth Saeima in 2018. The next year also marks the Centenary of Latvia. There is a lot of important work ahead of us. You still have the opportunity to work properly!

I urge you to serve responsibly, knowing that our deeds today are forging the Latvia of tomorrow. It is our task, responsibility, and opportunity to develop our country. Pending decisions are not an option. Every effort should be made to create the basis for good change.

I wish you a joyful Līgo (Midsummer Eve) and a prolific summer!