

Address by President of Latvia Raimonds Vējonis at the opening of the Latvia-Germany Business Forum

25 February 2019

Dear Mr President of the Chamber,
Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

This is the last, fifth day of a state visit rich in significant events and meetings. I am genuinely pleased with the many conversations and activities that have taken place during this state visit, which covered a wide range of topics starting from the troubled waters of current international politics to the preservation of the common historical heritage of Latvia and Germany.

I have the honour to be here right in Hamburg to devote this day to economic cooperation between Latvia and Germany. From the ancient times of the Hanseatic League, trade and shipping have linked us to Hamburg. Even today, ever-increasing trade and intensive cooperation in transport and logistics characterise economic relations between Latvia and Germany. Germany is the second largest foreign trade partner of Latvia; both countries share long-standing and fruitful cooperation in transport distinguished by an excellent air network, as well as active collaboration with German ports by providing ensuring efficient cargo flow and passenger flow. More than 10 direct flights linking Riga to major cities in Germany daily are bringing Latvia and Germany closer. Every year, several tens of thousands of travellers from Latvia enjoy German hospitality, and visitors from Germany have the opportunity to visit Latvia to enjoy diverse tourism opportunities or to build business contacts.

In the age of rapid technological development, almost every area of our cooperation is related to digital solutions, the development of new technologies, innovation, science, and research. I am pleased to note that the Latvian entrepreneurs who develop products with the highest added value and our scientists who contribute to the development of the latest technologies have gathered here today.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

There are both infrastructure and smart and creative scientists and entrepreneurs in Latvia for innovative ideas and products to appear. We have excellent digital infrastructure and digital solutions that open up extensive opportunities for cross-industry collaboration. Latvia's advanced digital infrastructure needs to be deployed when stimulating companies to take advantage of digital technologies and products even more. We are pleased to see that investors from Germany also appreciate those opportunities. Nanotechnology development, smart materials and coatings, optical fibre production, these are areas where German investors have entered and operate successfully in Latvia. We wish this cooperation to continue and expand into the sectors that we have chosen as our priorities, that is, [already mentioned] development of smart cities, smart materials, biomedicine, and robotics. Companies representing Latvia at this forum play an essential role in the development of those industries in our country.

Moreover, I would like to point out that the development of all those sectors mentioned share one factor, digital data and its use for the development of services that are more efficient and better products. In this area, we have started cooperation with German

companies like Bosch, SAP, and Siemens. Latvia has developed a national digitalisation strategy and is currently actively implementing it.

Digital solutions play a significant role in the development of cross-industry cooperation, which, in its turn, contributes to the rapid growth of the Latvian ICT industry. In recent years, exports of Latvian ICT services has grown by an average of 20% per year. We intend to keep this growth by becoming a truly digital nation. As an example in the field of digital solutions, I would like to mention the forest area monitoring and accounting systems of JSC Latvian State Forests by using a drone and geospatial information technologies, as well as the drone flight management system created by the Latvian Mobile Phone. You will have an opportunity to be acquainted with those and other digital solutions in the course of the forum.

I am confident that our existing and future cooperation will provide new opportunities for both Latvian and German companies to integrate into international value chains and become stronger and more competitive in both Europe and global markets.

I wish you an exchange of creative ideas and new contacts to achieve the goals set and to boost the growth and prosperity of both Latvia and Germany.