

World Latvian Economics and Innovation Forum
19 November 2020

Remarks
by the Parliamentary Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Zanda Kalniņa-Lukaševica

Mrs Saulītis,
Mr Andersons,
Ladies and Gentlemen,
Dear Friends,

I congratulate you in this festive week when we are celebrating the 102nd anniversary of Latvia! This was a special holiday. It urged us to look into to our inner selves and to listen and reflect on what Latvia means, what the freedom and independence mean for Latvia, and how we each feel on Latvia's birthday.

This year we could not celebrate with the traditional mega fireworks display on the banks of the River Daugava. But we can still celebrate and wish all the best to Latvia, with each of us in our own homes, together with our families. Sometimes it is exactly when things are simple and ordinary – without the typical holiday rush – that we can most clearly see the radiance of the country whose birthday we celebrate and the value that sets it apart from all others.

This year, a quieter happiness replaced the grand balls and gatherings to which we are accustomed. The COVID-19 pandemic has made the world stop this year, it has changed our daily lives, making us focus more on our health and the health of the members of our family, and it has also made many families more worried about their future and where the money will come from. Only together, by supporting each other and conscientiously attending to our safety and observing safety measures, shall we overcome this crisis.

We're being tempered by hardships yet again. This time it is the entire world that has been affected. But we must strengthen our determination and that of our fellow-citizens to withstand this threat and endure it: this situation will not last forever. The first reports are arriving about effective vaccines in development, and prospects on when we'd be able to say that we have overcome the crisis and it has been left behind are starting to crystallise.

The new reality has transformed the way the World Latvian Economics and Innovation Forum is held. The new reality has compelled and enabled us to appreciate, acquire and employ the opportunities offered by the internet on a much greater extent. We are not separated; we are even further united and interconnected.

My thanks to the organizers of the forum, who were able to adjust, in a short time, the way the event is run and transform it into a fully online format. You have done a fantastic job. Thank you!

I am already certain at this point that the event will be a success! Almost 500 people from 25 countries have registered their participation, but another 2000 have expressed interest in following the forum as it is streamed online through social networks and internet portals. The forum has already outdone the achievements of the previous years.

This only one example that Latvia and our people can achieve more despite the hurdles we face. ***We know how to transform hurdles into springboards!*** What else can characterise Latvians better than that? We know how to transform hurdles into springboards.

Let us look at Latvia's export figures this year! The export of Latvian goods increased to a historic high in September 2020 exceeding last year's export turnover by 7.7%, which includes a 13% increase in the value of exported goods. The main factor behind the increase of exports in September was the excellent harvest. Nevertheless, there is an increase in other areas as well, which is more related to the successful performance of our industries, which places Latvia ahead of many other European countries. The export of electrical equipment and mechanical equipment also increased considerably in September – by 39.6% and 32.2% respectively. The forecasts are that Latvian exports will keep growing in the coming months.

Each and every one of the WLEIF participants can do much on this front. Latvia's overall achievements definitely open new opportunities for our manufacturers and exporters at the individual level as well. I hope that the forum will offer new sales opportunities and new markets for export! This event brings together businesses from more than 25 countries.

“While we have been looking around for those who could help, we found the strongest and best helper in ourselves,” said the writer and poet Kārlis Skalbe in his “Brief Notes” 100 years ago.

However, this moment does not mean a chance for stopping and taking a break. Not at all! Latvia's GDP for the third quarter of this year has decreased by 3.1% from a year earlier. This means that we must be able to support, in a smart way, the sectors and people who have lost jobs and incomes due to the pandemic.

There is still much effort, and many hurdles and challenges lying ahead of us. The right path must be found. The growth in exports has and will be of a decisive importance.

I'm going to set out three lines of action.

First, Brand Latvia – a unified concept of the image we want to project and convey. We spoke about that during last year's forum in Valmiera. In a year's time we have been working and covered much ground. There are good solutions, ideas, decisions and prospects. Now it is the matter of implementation! I am happy that the Investment and Development Agency of Latvia and its new director are actively involved in this work. Together with society leaders and the private sector all that is necessary must be done in time. Very soon, we'll be able to follow a presentation by Andris Rubīns on devising a unified concept for Brand Latvia.

Second, innovation. Latvia has many strengths and advantages. They must be further mobilised. Latvia has one of the fastest mobile networks globally speaking and one of those with the highest density of users – and on top of that, the internet available to anyone. Latvia can count itself among the countries that was first to launch the use of the 5G network in the world. What's more, it is in Latvia that high quality, safe 5G internet routers in such high demand around the world are manufactured.

The construction of *Rail Baltica* was launched this year. The construction project is expected to create many well-paid jobs. Rail Baltica is a project that features not only new rails and tracks and high-speed trains, which will enable fast and climate-friendly travel from the Baltic States to and from the central and western Europe. This is a project with a truly advanced concept and modern technologies.

Another important aspect is Latvia's commitment to actively and from day one to engage in Europe's transition to green energy. This also opens opportunities to develop and manufacture new technologies in Latvia. Jointly with the region's countries, Latvia continues its progress in setting up a free, transparent and diversified regional energy market. Synchronisation of the Baltic States'

electricity networks with the continental European network remains Latvia's main priority in the energy sector. It will ensure security of the supply of energy in the region.

These are but few of the vivid examples of the excellence of Latvian innovation and technologies.

I am looking forward to this forum's panel discussions which bring together a number of notable Latvian business people, innovators, technology developers. Innovation and excellence will pave the way for Latvia's economic growth following the pandemic.

Cooperation is vital. It is vital to build new cooperation networks and opportunities and listen to one's partners. One such example is the Three Seas Initiative: as proposed by the Foreign Ministry, it will be discussed by several excellent interlocutors at the second panel of today's forum.

In view of that, the third point to make is our will, determination and the ability to work together. From Western Australia to the Canadian North. From Rio de Janeiro to the Bay of Riga. By working together, cooperating and supporting each other, we are able to accomplish remarkable things and we will be able to achieve new excellence and increase prosperity for our people here – in beautiful Latvia, the one and only Latvia, our Latvia.

Cooperation is the strongest weapon we have in the world today!

“I have little to say myself because the people themselves have begun to speak. To speak with their deeds – this is the best and most powerful language we have,” Kārlis Skalbe wrote. And let me conclude with these words.

Let our deeds and actions speak for themselves in economy, business and innovation! Let our work speak for us as we develop a unified concept for Brand Latvia.

Let our deeds that lead to increasing prosperity and quality of life in Latvia speak for us.

Long live Latvia!