

Mr President,
First Lady,
Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen:

It is a great pleasure to be with you here today on the occasion of the state visit of the Latvian president. President Zatlere and I meet regularly, since political life today is dynamic and completely different to the way it was in days when you rarely managed to get together, and if you did, mostly in a horse and carriage! We meet each other under a variety of circumstances, dramatic and official, but also warm and friendly.

In receiving you, Mr President, it is especially pleasant to be able to so easily unite those two sides: the official and the amicable. It is not something you can do with everyone. The past that Estonia and Latvia share, the historical roots that we share, and our common interests today need no explanation. We know there is much that brings us together. We know that our neighbourliness and friendship is timeless.

At all of the meetings we have with politicians today we talk about the economy and the difficult financial situation. One of my acquaintances always corrects me at this juncture, saying that it is difficult to remove boulders from a field; situations are not difficult, but complex. And that is a fair point: leading politicians need to be aware of the words they use and the emotional charge this gives the people, be positive or negative. The economic situation is a complicated one, but resolving complicated problems is what people have a brain and a heart for. Complex situations show us all too clearly that management is not just arithmetic with money. Managing – leading – people and countries requires a simultaneous appreciation of a wide range of circumstances.

Mr President, you have worked for many years as a doctor. We all know that one of the most important qualities a doctor needs is an ability to make quick decisions, because you have to make them about people's lives and health. As the head of state of Latvia it is a quality that you have undoubtedly required and that you will continue to require. I wish you every strength!

On this festive occasion it is of course a good idea to also think of the brighter side of life and of long-standing values. No financial difficulty will influence the beauty of the language of Janis Rainis. No inflation will affect the notes written by Peteris Vasks. No crisis will rock the foundations of the monuments created by Karlis Zale. Crises come and crises go, but the works of talented people will always be with us, and always move us.

I could go on and list dozens of other names from the fine arts and science, as well as the field of history: the names of people whose work and creations have exerted a positive influence not only on the southern side of the Estonian border but also on the northern side of the Latvian border. I mention the border, whose Schengen symbolism you and I, Mr President, underscored just fifteen months ago when we removed the defunct barrier between Valga and Valka.

But I would like to mention one more name before I conclude. It is a name that the dust of history was wiped from only very recently. The Republic of Estonia was declared on the 24th of February, and the nation's birth certificate was issued in 1918. But the first man to fall in Tallinn

for the newly declared republic was a Latvian, and his name was Johann Muischneek.

Let us raise a toast to the friendship and success of Latvia and Estonia!

Lai dzīvo Latvija!