



Foreword

This is the latest of a now traditional series of publications about Latvia, the Human Development Report. It is a happy occasion because in this report we can read about the changes that have occurred over the last year, but which may have gone unnoticed in our everyday lives. Due consideration is given to the trends that have developed in recent years and which may have become more marked just at this time.

The main emphasis of the Report, and this too has become a tradition, is on society, on human development in its various aspects. I would like to note that the issue is the transformation of our society into an “open society”. To overcome the seclusion and isolation of the past and for a stable, secure and open European society to evolve requires long term development. The Report contains many valuable observations and the characteristic trends of our paths of development have been laid out.

Latvia’s transformation into an open society has been rapid, although the pace has been unequal in the capital and various regions. This has often led to quite contradictory moods of opinion among the various sections of our society.

Many in Latvia feel estranged and uncertain. Such feelings form a part of society’s self awareness, just like the feelings of social and individual security in the past and today and the sense of belonging to the country and the rhythm of its development.

The task of state institutions and politicians is to be in touch with the mood of society during this period of transition. This permits a clearer understanding of the factors uniting all the diverse groups living in Latvia.

Latvia has always been a country of various cultures, languages and faiths. This is true today and will be true tomorrow. As Latvia develops into an open society, we must not forget that which binds us together in one country and which identifies us as this country’s masters and patriots. Diversity in culture — unity in state and social development. This is only an apparent contrast, but should certainly serve as an impulse for innovation.

The authors of the Report have aimed to stimulate reflection on these “eternal” questions. Every generation of society offers its own solutions and they remain interesting and topical. Today’s generation is also trying to define the individual’s relationship with the state, what the individual expects from the state and vice versa.

As in every European country, in Latvia it is important to be aware of how to shape relations and perceptions between various ethnic and social groups. In this respect Latvia inherited a particularly unfavourable situation, however our peaceful development so far is a daily inspiration and an impulse in the search for the right solutions. As a country which has only recently regained its independence, the central question in Latvia is, what is meant by “loyalty to the country.”

May I express my gratitude to the staff of the Latvian bureau of the United Nations Development Programme and also to the authors of the Report for all their efforts. It is a worthy and necessary investment towards the development of our society’s self understanding. The Report is a welcome source of thought and inspiration.

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President of the Republic of Latvia
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