



Politics is the sphere in which adopted decisions affect human development in the most direct manner. For example, Latvia's goal of acceding to the European Union and the NATO Alliance is not an end in itself, but rather a means for guaranteeing the security of the country and for promoting its rapid and sustainable development. Similarly, it is possible through politics to increase the level of prosperity and welfare of the people with the aid of qualitative pension, health care and rural development policies.

While the adoption of political decisions and the capacity of State institutions to implement them has improved greatly since Latvia regained its independence, I fully realize that the expectations and demands of our citizens have grown just as quickly. People have grown more critical. They wish to see policy-making conducted in a professional manner, and they want reasoned decisions to be taken with predictable outcomes.

Decision-making should not be restricted to the competence of professional politicians. Politicians must listen to the voice of public opinion and must be interested in seeing increased citizen participation in policy processes, as well as responsibility for one's actions. It is a positive sign that Latvia's six-thousandth non-governmental organization was registered this May, and that the participation of NGOs is increasing in the preparation of draft regulatory documents. The National Trilateral Co-operation Council is successfully serving its role as a forum for the harmonisation of opinions with the Latvian Employers' Confederation and the Latvian Association of Free Trade Unions. Any inhabitant of the country can now receive information on documents that have been submitted or approved by the Cabinet, by accessing them directly on the government's home page on the Internet.

The above reflects my subjective opinions as a politician. In order to obtain a full and objective overview of the total picture, the analyses of independent experts are vitally necessary in evaluating the notions and conceptions of politicians, civil servants, entrepreneurs, NGOs, the mass media and other groupings. As the British author and theologian G. Chesterton once wrote, practically everyone wishes to receive honest, impassionate and truthful information that conforms to their opinions. But sometimes in order to obtain an accurate picture one must be prepared to receive honest, impassionate and truthful information that does not conform to one's opinions and even refutes them.

For several years, the UNDP-supported **Latvia Human Development Report** has been the best example of such research available in Latvia. I can attest to this because I have personally participated in the formulation of past issues as an employee of the Latvian Ministry of Welfare. While the 2000/2001 **Report** does contain some disputable contentions and conclusions, its overall level of research, as always, is very high. I would like to stress that the authors of this **Report** have taken pains not only to criticize, but also to highlight the positive trends and to provide recommendations for improving policy-making in Latvia. I hope that their efforts will be appreciated and that this **Report** will be widely used as a tool for both policy analysis and the resolution of practical issues.

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