

Address of the President of Latvia Andris Bērziņš at the ASEM Education Ministers' Meeting

27.04.2015

Excellencies, Ladies, and Gentlemen,

It is my great honour to open the fifth Asia-Europe Education Ministers' Meeting, which is one of the largest educational forums in the world. It is symbolic that the forum takes place at the Latvian National Library, whose mission is to enlighten every aspiring person with knowledge. We call this place as the Castle of Light.

Topics that will be discussed during the meeting today, that is, quality of education and reasonable mobility are topical in every country. At present, Latvia is actively working on improvement of quality of the education system, following the example of those countries that have already proved themselves in Europe such as general education system in Finland, and relying on our historical experience, which is sometimes wrongly forgotten or even considered as useless.

Education without adjustment to occupation and career promotion in a particular industry or a company is just broadening horizons of an individual. It is the baggage of knowledge that loses its value and empties if not used and applied in practice. Today, we are facing a new trend and a new experience at the same time, when young people, who have studied just for the sake of obtaining an academic degree become unsuccessful job seekers, who even have not really started to work. Youth unemployment is a consequence of an incorrect education policy and ill-considered social policy. In many countries, it is a relatively new problem, but it should be tackled immediately. Otherwise, we will lose a whole generation, who is leaving for richer countries while searching for job and income and most often becomes a low-skilled workforce, because they do not see opportunities for applying their own knowledge.

While developing its vocational education system, Latvia has actively cooperated with the countries that have successfully implemented the model of dual education. It provides young people both with theoretical and practical knowledge simultaneously with a link to a particular company and occupation therein. Our main partners are Germany, Austria, and Switzerland. Latvia takes over their experience that is recognized as the most successful in Europe. The lowest unemployment rate among young people in those countries proves the same verity as well.

Technology is developing proactively in the modern world nowadays, requiring new knowledge and skills throughout one's life. At present, it is not actually possible to build a successful professional career throughout the life due to the education obtained once. This issue is addressed by lifelong learning rooted fundamentally in availability of vocational education. This means that any education and training must be complemented with all the novelties entering the occupation once acquired, everyone should be ready to compete not only in his or her industry, but also be ready to take the courage to retrain for a new, previously even unplanned work.

In recent years, Latvia becomes increasingly attractive for those foreign young people, who wish to have a competitive higher education. A number of foreign students in Latvian universities doubles every three years, especially in medicine and technical sciences. Rectors and academics from Latvian universities always actively participate in the team representing our country during foreign official visits in order to form as many direct contacts as possible in the education sector exactly. A number of intergovernmental and university co-operation agreements have been signed that justify themselves already today and will ensure return in the future, because education is one of the most valuable exports of Latvia.

This meeting is a reference point and a basis for discussion concerning our future cooperation in the open, mobile, and technologically advancing world simultaneously. It is possible that we will not solve all the problems immediately, but I believe that a common understanding of the opportunities for cooperation and solutions will significantly increase the contacts between European and Asian countries in the field of education after this forum.

Thank you!