

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen !

I have a great honour to greet you with the 3rd Estonian Local Governments' Congress !

One week ago we had the Local Governments' Forum in Latvia – the 20th Congress of the Latvian Association of the Local and Regional Governments.

During this complicated time the Local Governments in Latvia more explicit comprehend the necessity to strengthen local authorities. The cities in Latvia show keen interest to this issue, but the capital – Riga is the most active in promoting strength of local authorities.

The Local Governments are a foundation of the State and at the same time the most closer authority to every inhabitant. People meeting difficulties always turn to the Local Governments' support.

The Local Governments in Latvia take care of schools and kindergardens. That is why the Local Governments are the most familiar with needs and problems of inhabitants. And that is why the Local Governments should have feasibilities to protect the interests of inhabitants.

During the Congress of the Latvian Association of Local and Regional Governments the City of Riga came out with initiative to strengthen the role of the Local Governments in the State succeeding a real opportunity to affect developments in the State. As one of the most significant precondition, in our mind, is to obtain legislative initiatives, because today the Local Governments in Latvia have neither rights to propose amendments to the current laws nor to facilitate elaboration of new normative acts.

Riga is the Capital of Latvia and the centre of the State economy as well. The Minister for Regional Development and Local Governments has considered that under conditions of crisis Riga will be the main "engine" of the State. We in the Riga City Council are aware of this fact very clearly and therefore we hold a view that in spite of difficult time there are some advantages and one of them is a possibility to make such decisions which would not be, probably, accepted due to the lack of will.

I would like to emphasize that all the inhabitants of the Baltic States have to think about development and competitiveness of all the Baltic Region. The Local Governments can facilitate in developing the most effective ways of co-operation not only at the level of cities, but on the State Regions scale as well.

Attractive Regions start with attractive cities. For promotion of the whole Baltic Region it is important to have strong Regional centres, strong cities and to develop regional co-operation.

In the conclusion let me wish you very fruitful work in this Congress and I do wish to have strong Local Governments in Estonia and much success in the coming elections of the Local Governments of Estonia.

