

Preparing for Latvia's Centennial

This year, we celebrate Latvia's 98th birthday, already thinking of its upcoming centennial on November 18, 2018. While preparing for the grand celebration, it is time to define new goals for ourselves and agree on those values we wish to take with us for the upcoming hundred years.

On November 18, 1918, during the ceremony of proclamation of Latvia 38 members of People's Council understood it was only a beginning and the future would bring difficult tasks. Just like at school when each year of studies is more complex than the previous one. However, the happiness for one's own country was greater than the fear of future difficulties.

And indeed, until 1940 Latvia blossomed, and the national self-esteem of the Latvian people become stronger. But the period of independence was followed by Soviet occupation, during which the nation lost its brightest and most talented minds, the economy built during the independence was destroyed, and the Soviet power attempted to crush the self-esteem and the free will of the people.

But the idea of a free and independent Latvia was not to be crushed. In 1980s, the individual creative protest manifestations of brave young artists, writers, poets and other activists gradually turned into a national movement of protest.

On August 23, 1989, during the Baltic Way manifestation, two million people in all three Baltic countries joined hands to testify their wish to be free again. This 600 km long human chain which started in Tallinn, Estonia and led through Latvia all the way to Vilnius, Lithuania, was **the grandest flash-mob in the modern history** that inspired people all across the world. With the signing of the Declaration of Independence on May 4, 1990, the country of Latvia, in which we currently live, was reborn.





Vaira Vīķe-Freiberga, President of Latvia, said in her public address on July 29, 2001: "We are a rich nation because we have inherited a lot. We are a beautiful nation because our heritage has been sifted and tested through centuries. We only have what was recognized as good. [...] We have been given our history so that we could choose how to handle it, how to accept it and make it ours."

The human history has seen the rise and fall of many nations and countries. Today, 7 billion people live in 200 countries, and 0.029% of them live in Latvia. Our country is so small that its existence is a miracle, to be protected and cherished. The world is open, and information technologies allow us to be a part of the Latvian information space regardless of our physical location. But the Latvian state cannot exist without our physical participation – or the name "Latvia" might become nothing more than just a domain in the virtual space, and its land turn into an anonymous point of destination in the global movement of goods. Only our willingness to be a part of this land and people, readiness to act together, will provide a meaning to Latvia, to exist and develop for the next hundred years.

Thousands of years ago Aristotle defined that the supreme meaning for founding a state: "A state is founded not for us to survive in it, but mostly – for us to live happily in it." The state of Latvia was born in difficult times, and during its first hundred years, its existence has been a story of survival and self-preservation. So let us unite our common efforts and positive thinking to live a happy and prosperous life from now on.

