

Dear guests, Dear participants,

I'm honoured and privileged to welcome you in Riga, Presidency of the European Council, where among many important international events held in Riga we see the International Scientific Network conference on "Fostering Latvia – India cooperation".

I would like to highlight to the esteemed audience the importance of Latvia – India relationship. Latvia and India has always had a very special relationship, based on common values and interests.

First of all I would like to mention here, that as we all know, Mahatma Gandhi initiated a movement for nonviolent resistance, which guided India to independence, and inspired movements for civil rights and freedom across the world. Thus the Baltic Way, when nearly two million people joined hands forming a human chain from Tallinn through Riga to Vilnius, proved that faith in democratic ideas and love of freedom can together

generate a spirit of unity, which led to the nonviolent renewal of independence of the Baltic States. So you can see - and we can argue about how direct or indirect this was - but what was done in India certainly has given an impetus to democratic movements elsewhere in the world and has been and remains a positive example for other countries, including Latvia. These are values Latvia and India share and a truth which we have shown in our histories.

Second, although being thousands kilometers apart, we have been historically linked by the ancient trade route called *The Amber Way*. India has been one of the destinations for Baltic amber: and we are proud that India's Prime Minister Indira Gandhi wore an amber necklace – a gift presented by our well known poet and translator Mirdza Ķempe.

Dear participants,

Now is a time to reinterpret our special ties into modernity. Year 2015 has been a very special year for Latvia in bridging Asia – Europe cooperation. On the end of April we hosted two ASEM

(*Asia-Europe Meeting*) meetings in Riga. The Fifth ASEM Education Ministers' Meeting took place in Riga on 27 and 28 April 2015 and brought together almost two hundred participants from 46 ASEM members, including India, and 11 stakeholders. We used this meeting to set the priorities of the future work-cycle and encourage joint actions to achieve results to serve the interests of both regions. The participants not only shared experience from their countries and organizations but also gave many constructive suggestions on how development of skills for better employability and new learning technologies in education could be tackled.

Furthermore, Latvia organized 3rd ASEM Transport Ministers' Meeting on 29-30 April. Member countries committed themselves to fostering closer cooperation in the field of transport and logistics between Asia and Europe, because our common vision for the development of transport networks between Asia and Europe is needed, in order to accommodate the growing trade flows between the two regions. For achieving

economic prosperity and sustainable development, connectivity is a significant force factor.

However, I would like to stress, that connectivity is not only about links of transport and infrastructure – it is also about establishing strong networks between academia and institutions, as well as people-to-people contacts and engagement of our societies. In order to reach the most fruitful results we have to have both – strong cooperation between our institutions and enthusiasts, like yourselves.

Dear participants,

Year 2015 has been a very special for Latvia – India relationship. At the beginning of the year we have opened the Latvian Embassy in New Delhi. Thus, adding another point of contact to the ones already existing - the Center of Indian Studies and Culture in Riga and the “Study in Latvia Center” in Chennai, Tamil Nadu. Embassy of Latvia would also serve as the contact point between the countries, our people as well as our business communities which show increased interest in expanding

cooperation. As most promising areas for the business cooperation Latvia considers transport and logistics, higher education, ICT, life sciences and tourism. I believe that in the near future we will experience also the growth of bilateral trade and investments between our countries.

In conclusion, I would like to use this opportunity to commend the outstanding and diligent work of Professor Sigma Ankrava, Head of the Indian Studies and Culture Center, and the organizing team for this important event. Thank you for providing us the momentum to discuss the multifaceted Latvia-India cooperation!

Once again, warm thanks and I wish you fruitful discussions!