

**Speech of the Minister of Education and Science
of the Republic of Latvia
Ina Druviete
at the VI Dikļu Forum on Social Market Economy
May 27th, 2014**

Your Excellency!

Highly honorable Mr. Beckmann-Dierkes!

Distinguished representatives and experts of the education system!

Ladies and Gentlemen!

I would like to start with gratitude to the Konrad Adenauer Foundation for its support in organizing the Forum. It is just in time! Raising the prestige of vocational education and training, improving students' competitiveness in the European labor market, as well as facilitating industry engagement in dual vocational education and training are very relevant tasks for Latvia.

It is no accident that it is exactly the Konrad Adenauer Foundation, which has undertaken the effort to organize the Dikļu Forum. Germany has been long famous for its well-developed dual vocational education and training system. Already during the visit of German Federal Chancellor Angela Merkel to Latvia in 2010, high-level discussions on possibilities of Latvian and German in-depth collaboration in the field of education and science took place, one of the topics being Germany's support in the field of higher education and vocational training.

At the time, Ms. Merkel and our former Prime Minister Valdis Dombrovskis met with Latvian and German entrepreneurs at a round-table discussion to evaluate the business environment in Latvia.

During this high-level meeting, it became clear that the biggest problem for entrepreneurs was lack of skilled and qualified professionals.

Therefore, we can consider the Dikļi Forum as a logical step in the sequence of many events and initiatives, aimed at closer cooperation between the two countries and diversification of Latvian vocational education opportunities.

Provision of good quality apprenticeships, including work-based learning is doubtless one of the top European Union policy priorities. When it comes to the economic and social development, an even closer link between education and employment is being built. It should be also noted that the European Union considers work-based learning as one of the means for facilitating youth employment and preventing unemployment, which is a very important argument for improving Latvian vocational training system.

Which steps has Latvia taken then in implementing dual vocational education?

In 2013, the Ministry of Education and Science asked 10 vocational schools to consider a possibility of launching a pilot project. Six schools, which responded to this call, started the implementation of the project in the school-year 2013/2014. In total, the number of participants in work-based learning amounts to 145 students engaged in 17 different programs at these schools, and there is established cooperation with 29 enterprises.

It is important that work-based learning is being implemented in programs with profiles matching Latvian industry branches with the highest export capacity: metal working industries, mechanical engineering, wood industry, transit, logistics, pharmacy, and chemistry.

It shows that piloting work-based learning is closely linked to the Latvian economy, entrepreneurs are interested in cooperation, and the training complies with the existing market requirements. The range of programs should be definitely broadened, for example, by including the informational technology and public service sectors.

Furthermore, in the school year 2014/2015, vocational training institutions are encouraged to implement work-based learning in collaboration with regional

employers and local governments, which would enable achieving an optimal training model.

What are the benefits of this approach?

I believe that potential benefits can be viewed at two levels – first, as a paradigm change in the area of vocational education and, secondly, as strengthening of the capacity of vocational education institutions and improvement of the quality of education facilities because of a closer link between education and employment.

Undoubtedly, we not only need to talk about the benefits and achievements, but also should be able to identify problems.

In Latvia, we are facing several challenges, which include facilitation of business engagement and discussing the incentives, student insurance and third-party liability insurance, wide range of financing issues, quality of training, lack of appropriate organizational culture and philosophy, and others.

We have also identified possible solutions to some of these problems. Our recommendations include a possibility of tax exemption for entrepreneurs engaged in work-based learning and revision of existing legal framework regulating vocational training and employment issues.

Cooperation with employers in initiating the necessary changes and amendments could be improved, as well as drawing up and approving alternative funding models for those engaged in work-based learning and providing special training programs for mentors and training supervisors. The possibility of allocation of European Union funding for approval and implementation of dual vocational education and training should also be considered.

Ladies and Gentlemen!

One says that good education is what has been left over after we have forgotten all

that we have been taught. I am sure: if dual vocational education and training is effectively linked to the work environment already at the education stage, it is a good education, which is retained for a lifetime.

Let me once again thank the Konrad Adenauer Foundation for organizing the Dikļi forum and all the participants for their contribution to the debate. In our case, work-based learning not only means close cooperation between the school, the student and the company. It also means a very close cooperation between our countries - Latvia and Germany – in acquiring the best expertise and sharing it selflessly.

Thank you for your attention!