

Good morning Ladies and Gentlemen,

I feel highly honoured for the opportunity to welcome you all to Latvia, to the 6th EQAVET Annual Forum. I would also like to express how sincerely excited I am to meet colleagues, friends and likeminded people here.

We have come together from many countries – all with different backgrounds and experiences, but we share a common goal to learn from each other in order to find the best solutions to improve the quality of education. The challenge each country faces is providing our schools with a high quality education system. I am sure, everyone gathered here today is aware that the quality of our education affects the quality of our lifestyle. This is simply to say that a high quality education is the basis for economic growth and development of any country. The most vital question still remains - What is a quality education? How do we know whether or not schools are run effectively? Which characteristics describe an excellent education? I strongly believe and promote the idea that it is essential that all parties involved in educational processes at various levels should reach a common understanding of what a contemporary, innovative school is and what we consider to be quality education. I believe that the development of this common understanding about a quality assurance is the main goal what EQAVET stands for.

The State Education Quality Service coordinates both, the implementation of the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework in vocational education and training, and the introduction of the common quality assurance indicators in vocational education at a national level since 2013. During the past 2 years we have experienced a very good collaboration with our social partners and stakeholders. The Sectoral Expert Councils were briefed on alignment of the EQAVET criteria with the national quality assurance system. Moreover, the discussions were held with institutions, such as the Employers' Confederation of Latvia, the Free Trade Union Confederation of Latvia, the Ministry of Education and Science, the State Employment Agency, the State Revenue Service and the Association of the Vocational Education.

I believe that it is only through mutual support and co-operation that schools, parents, local governments, our Service, social partners, stakeholders, other public institutions and authorities, as well as non-governmental organizations can jointly work towards our common goal – the quality of education. It is our aim to build and monitor effective quality assurance approaches, deepen and strengthen the culture of quality assurance.

Taking into consideration all social partners', stakeholders' opinion about quality assurance in vocation education and training, the EQAVET indicators are implemented in the draft of the Regulation of the Cabinet of Ministers.

We Latvians have a lot to be proud of. We have wonderful landscapes, forests that stretch out for kilometres, as well as a rich history and culture. One of our most popular cultural events, after Midsummer's night, is the Song and Dance festival that has been held every 4 years since 1873. But what we are most proud of is our people. Their work ethics and their sacrifices for the development of our country is remarkable.

It is not a coincidence that the EQAVET forum is held in Latvia during the Latvian Presidency of the Council of the European Union. Part of the Presidency's cultural programme are the souvenirs. The special Latvian gift to you is the svilpaunieks (ceramic whistle).

The clear sound of the svilpaunieks (ceramic whistle) tells the story of Latvian ceramic tradition - a craft perfected over hundreds of years that is still thriving today.

These Presidency souvenirs have been handmade by almost 40 different ceramic artists from all parts of Latvia. It means that every one of the little birds is unique. The oldest lady who has agreed to make 100 whistles is 83 years old, and the youngest artist is 26.

Once again, it is an honor to welcome you all to Latvia, for the 6th EQAVET Annual Forum and I am looking forward to a positive, productive and collaborative work over the next couple of days.