

*By Flemming Stender, ambassador of Denmark to Latvia*

See you soon again, Latvia!

This summer my term as Danish ambassador in Latvia will be coming to an end. After four years in Latvia, it is time for me to return home to Denmark. Having lived, worked and travelled in the Baltic States for more than 25 years, I am however convinced that I will be coming back to Latvia again and again. Thus, for me it does not feel like a goodbye to Latvia, but more like a “see you soon again!”.

Upon leaving Latvia, it is natural to take a little time to look back and to reflect on the past four years. To remember highlights, achievements, personal experiences, and to think about all the things in Latvia that I am certainly going to miss. Despite that my years in Latvia have been strongly influenced by global developments, first the covid-19 pandemic, and then Russia’s illegal invasion in Ukraine, I have many wonderful memories from my time in Latvia to take with me home.

First of all, I am thinking about all the people I have had the pleasure to meet and work with. Many wonderful colleagues, and interesting persons from all parts of the Latvian society that I have been fortunate to meet and get to know. Official representatives from government, parliament, cities and regions, people from the business sector, civil and cultural organisations, and many more. All of them receiving me with open arms and curiosity, interested in dialogue, and the strengthening of ties between Denmark and Latvia.

On my trips around the country, I have in particular enjoyed visiting many schools and educational institutions. For example several visits to the Nordic Gymnasium in Riga where I have been impressed by student’s knowledge of the difficult Danish language. I have appreciated the interesting discussions with many students on the common challenges and opportunities we face, such as climate change, and the green transition. I have been pleased to discover their keen interest in knowing more about Denmark and the Danish society. Quite a few of them with a dream to go to Denmark to study.

The beautiful Latvian nature with its abundance of opportunities for outdoor activities in the woods, nature parks, bogs, and beautiful beaches is another thing I will surely miss. The wide sandy beaches in my home town of Jūrmala where I have spent so much time walking, running, biking or just relaxing will forever be with me. I have had opportunity to visit almost every corner of the country, but I still feel that there is so much more I should see and experience. Exploring Latvia is a never ending endeavour, and a good reason to come back!

Another thing to be missed is Latvian food! Cabbage, kefir, and tomato juice have become an important part of my daily life, local products at their best, and contributing to a healthy life style. It will be difficult to find these in Denmark.

There have been many highlights during these four years. In 2021, Denmark and Latvia celebrated 100 years anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations, and 30th anniversary of the restoration of diplomatic relations. The double jubilee was marked on several occasions in both Denmark and Latvia. At the foreign ministers’ summit in Copenhagen in June 2021, Denmark and the three Baltic States agreed on a joint vision for the future cooperation with a focus on common fundamental values, security and defence, and strengthened cooperation on climate and green transition.

The bilateral contacts between Denmark and Latvia are strong as witnessed by many high-level visits. Most notably, the visit by Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen to Riga in March 2022 announcing the deployment of a Danish infantry battalion to Latvia to strengthen NATO’s Eastern

flank after Russia's illegal invasion in Ukraine. A decision underlining that Denmark feels a special responsibility for the Baltic States. This has also been emphasized in the Danish government's new foreign and security policy strategy presented last week. A strategy setting the course for how Denmark should best navigate in world that has become more unpredictable and turbulent. Already since 2019, Denmark has led the build-up of the Multinational Division NATO HQ in Ādaži.

Besides the strong cooperation within foreign and security policy, the green agenda has been another cross-cutting priority for my work. The aim being to transfer Danish experiences and knowhow within environment, climate and energy. Danish biking culture, food waste, green and liveable cities, wind energy, and much more. Intensified cooperation within wind energy, district heating and energy efficiency has been in the centre. Experiences in development of offshore wind parks since Denmark's establishment of the world's first offshore wind park three decades ago may serve as inspiration for Latvia and the Baltic States. I am pleased about the close partnership established between the Danish and Latvian ministries for energy and climate following last year's Baltic Sea Energy Security Summit in Denmark. I am particular proud of the initiative taken three years ago by the Danish embassy and the Latvian Wind Energy Association to organize the "Wind works" conference" as an annual meeting platform for Danish, Latvian and international stakeholders to take stock of developments of wind energy in Latvia and the Baltic region. This year with the signing of a cooperation agreement between the port of Liepaja and the Danish port of Esbjerg as a very concrete outcome. I am sure that the conference will grow even bigger in the future with continued involvement of many of Denmark's world leading wind energy stakeholders.

It has indeed been a great privilege and honour to serve as Danish ambassador to Latvia. I am leaving Latvia with a great sense of proudness of the concrete outcomes of cooperation that have been achieved during the past four years, and with the knowledge that relations between Denmark and Latvia are as strong as ever.

Before I leave, I am looking forward to the summer and to experiencing for the first time the Latvian Song and Dance Festival, one of the strongest symbols of Latvian culture and nationhood, bringing together people through music and dance. See you there!