

By Ambassador of Denmark to Latvia, Flemming Stender

Jubilees, green transition and covid-19

With only a few days to Christmas and New Year, it is for many people one of the busiest and hectic periods of the year. It is time to wrap up many work-related tasks before the holidays, while also making sure to buy the last Christmas presents, and getting all the Christmas preparations done in time. Still, as the year is coming to an end, it is worth while to spend a little time to reflect about the year that has passed and look back on what has happen. Also myself as the Danish ambassador to Latvia, I like to look back on the occasions and themes that have dominated my past year working and living in Latvia. In particular, three things comes to my mind.

First and foremost, I will remember the past year for the two important jubilees. The 100th anniversary of Denmark's recognition de iure of Latvia and establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries on February 7th, 1921. Denmark was among some of the first countries to recognize the new Latvian state. We also celebrated the 30th anniversary of restorations of diplomatic relations on 24th August 1991, where Denmark played an active role and also was among the very first to restore diplomatic relations to Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania.

The two jubilees were celebrated on several occasions throughout the year. On the 4th of June, the foreign ministers of the Denmark, Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania met in Copenhagen under the heading "Together in the past, present and future" and agreed on a new vision for the common cooperation. The cornerstones being our common values, cooperation on security and defence, and strengthened cooperation on climate and green transition. As ambassador of Denmark in Latvia, it is my duty to support the vision in the daily cooperation between Latvia and Denmark.

The jubilees were also celebrated in Riga on 25th August, where the Danish Embassy in Latvia and the Danish Cultural Institute in Riga held a historic conference focusing on the "Ties through time: Denmark and Latvia". Highlighting some of the important moments and stories from the shared history of the two countries. This included the 200 Danish volunteer soldiers who fought in Latvia in 1919 and helped to ensure the independence and security of the Baltic states.

Secondly, I look back on a year full of cooperation on green transition. Experiences have been shared in many different areas such as circular economy, waste, biking, ecology, foodwaste, energy efficiency and much more. One major highlight for me was the international wind energy conference co-organized by the Danish embassy and the Latvian Wind Energy Association in April bringing together international experts, stakeholders and policymakers to discuss the potential for wind energy in Latvia. As a global wind power with many decades of experiences in development of wind energy, Denmark has set an ambitious target to produce all electricity from renewables sources, mostly wind, before 2030. This is an important element in achieving Denmark's legally binding commitment to a 70% reduction of CO2 emissions by 2030. While it is true that Denmark accounts for only for a fraction of global CO2 emissions, we still believe that even a small country can make a great change, and we hope to inspire others by sharing our experiences for more sustainable and climate-neutral societies.

Finally, it is of course not possible to think back on 2021 without mentioning covid-19. Like the year before, 2021 has unfortunately also been dominated by the pandemic that has affected in so many ways our personal lives as well as the way we work. I have followed developments in Latvia closely, and also had opportunity to share some our experiences. This is important because we can learn a lot from each other, and no country can overcome the pandemic alone. Denmark and Latvia are working closely together with the other member states in the EU in finding common solutions to how to fight

the pandemic and support a greener and more resilient recovery of the economy and our societies. Only by working together, we will overcome this common challenge.

All in all, it has been a very intense year, and I am looking very much forward to the holidays celebrating Christmas with my family. My favourite Christmas moment is always on Christmas eve when the Christmas tree is being lit, and when we - as the tradition is in Denmark – hand in hand dance around the tree singing our traditional Danish Christmas songs. This is the feeling of Christmas for me!

A merry Christmas and best wishes for the new year for Latvia and Denmark!