



PRIME MINISTER ENGAGES NGO'S, EXPERTS AND MEDIA IN "TOWN HALL" DISCUSSION OF ON-GOING GOVERNMENT STRUCTURAL REFORMS

On Friday, May 15, Prime Minister Valdis Dombrovskis was joined by several cabinet ministers, the head of the State Chancery and other leading government figures in a frank discussion of on-going public administration reforms.

Following opening remarks from the Prime Minister, and an overview by the State Chancery of reform of the public administration system, prominent Latvian media journalists and political commentators shared their thoughts, comments and criticisms. Jānis Domburs, host of the popular LTV weekly talk show 'What is happening in Latvia' expressed the thoughts of many, that the formal transparency of the reform process should be strengthened in practical terms. Domburs recommended that the Latvian government adopt the Swedish model of making all government transactions, agreements, budget reports and expenditures available on-line on ministry web pages. Prime Minister Dombrovskis expressed support for this proposal and asked the State Chancery to address this issue.

Una Klapkalne, Executive Director of the national news agency *LETA*, observed that a lack of public confidence in politicians and public administration was hindering the implementation of structural reforms. Politicians themselves were not expressing sufficient support for the reforms. In response, Edgars Zalāns, Minister for Regional Development and Local Governments, proposed the creation of a special political council which would convene the Prime Minister and ministers responsible for public administration reforms, (the ministers for Finance, Economics, Regional Development and Local Governments). This council would have a common objective of accelerating the process and making it more efficient.

Experts also called for a clearer definition of what public administration should be like. Prime Minister Dombrovskis pointed out that public administration will never remain constant; its services and their public availability, as well as public expenditures, can be controlled and assessed and should be evaluated in comparison with other countries.

During the discussion, various opinions were expressed on the reorganisation of public administration institutions and agencies, decentralisation of administration functions by transferring them to a middle level (local governments), review of all public administration functions, thus determining which functions could be eliminated, transferred to private sector, centralised in one institution. Several opinions were voiced about supervision of state-owned companies, and introduction of a single legal regulation of civil service which would be binding also to those employed in local governments.

At the close of the discussion, Gunta Veismane, Director of the State Chancellery, thanked participants for their input and for their earlier participation in developing the reforms. A majority of the public and experts approve of public administration reforms, and by June 1 will

present to the State Chancellery an action plan for optimisation of public administration and civil service for its consideration in the Government.

The discussion was attended by more than 30 officials and high-level experts – Valdis Dombrovskis, Prime Minister, Māris Kuncīnskis, Representative of the Public Administration and Local Government Committee of the *Saeima* (Parliament), Artis Kampars, Minister for Economics, Edgars Zalāns, Minister for Regional Development and Local Governments, Gunta Veismane, Director of the State Chancellery, Andris Rāviņš, Mayor of the city of Jelgava, politologists Jānis Ikstens, Ivars Ījābs, Iveta Reinholde, journalists Jānis Domburs and Māris Zanders, business representatives Una Klapkalne, Andris Vilks, and representatives of non-governmental organisations and other spheres.

An audio recording of the discussion is downloadable on the website of the Cabinet of Ministers.

As previously reported, on 31 March 2009, the Cabinet of Ministers made a decision to organise the public discussion process on action plan for optimisation of public administration system and civil service in order to discuss the first version of the plan and include several other necessary measures in it. Every representative of the public had an opportunity to present his/her proposals by May 1 this year.

The action plan was drafted in line with the objective set forth in “Action Plan for Latvia’s Economic Stabilisation and Growth Revival Implementation”. It aims at establishing small and professional public administration which would be directed towards the society.

Further information about discussions and the draft plan is made available on the website of the Cabinet of Ministers, under the “Public Involvement” section: <http://www.mk.gov.lv/lv/sabiedribas-lidzdaliba/aktualitates/>

THE LATVIAN INSTITUTE

The Latvian Institute (Latvijas institūts) was established by the Latvian state to provide a wide range of information about Latvia, its society, culture and history.

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