

## M. Kučinskis: Latvia has a business-friendly environment for cooperation with China

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On Saturday 7 July, Prime Minister Māris Kučinskis met with Prime Minister of China Li Keqiang in Sofia. During the meeting, the officials discussed cooperation between the two countries, with particular emphasis on economic issues.

Over the last year, around 60 thousand travellers from China visited the Baltic States (this indicator is increasing by about 30% every year). M.Kučinskis expressed confidence that the Baltic region has reached sufficient capacity and commercial utility to provide direct regular air traffic between China and Rīga as the centre of the region. It is planned to commence regular flights for the route Rīga-Hainan-Rīga this year in cooperation with airline SCAT, which is registered in Kazakhstan.

The Prime Minister also expressed interest in practical further development of the container route between China and Europe.

"In February this year, I visited the Great Stone industrial and logistics park project in Minsk. Latvia wants to be very closely involved in the successful implementation of this project. Latvia enjoys close cooperation with the German company "AG Duisport"; therefore, when developing this project within the framework of the Belt and Road initiative, I call for designating Rīga as a direct exit point to the Baltic Sea," said M. Kučinskis.

He also confirmed that there is the support at the highest political level for the inflow of China's investment into the transport infrastructure of Latvia.

"Latvia has a friendly business environment; it is ready for various types of cooperation with China," said the Prime Minister.

The Prime Minister of China confirmed that his country is ready to continue the dialogue and cooperation with Latvia in a number of fields. During the meeting, Li Keqiang congratulated the Prime Minister for the centenary of Latvia.

The officials met in Sofia during the '16 + 1' summit of the Heads of Government of Central and Eastern Europe and China. The '16+1' format is an initiative of China aimed at intensifying cooperation with 11 EU Member States and 5 Balkan countries in the fields of investment, transport, finance, science, education, and culture. For Latvia, it complements the bilateral dialogue with China and China's dialogue within the strategic partnership.

The first '16+1' summit was held in 2012 in Warsaw (Poland). In 2016, the '16+1' summit of Central and Eastern Europe and China was held in Riga.

China is the major trading partner of Latvia in the Far East. Since 2012, exports of Latvian goods to China have almost tripled amounting to EUR 131.45 million in 2017 (by 9.25% more than in 2016). The number of Chinese tourists in the Baltic region reached almost 60,000 guests last year. The Latvian authorities are working intensively on attracting Chinese tourists in order to launch direct air traffic between Latvia and China.

Andrejs Vaivars

Press Secretary to the Prime Minister

Mob.: 29228678

E-mail: [Andrejs.Vaivars@mk.gov.lv](mailto:Andrejs.Vaivars@mk.gov.lv)

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