

**Address by Laimdota Straujuma, Prime Minister of the Republic of
Latvia, at the plenary meeting of COSAC
1 June 2015, Riga**

Honourable Speaker,

Chairmen of the European affairs committees,

Members of parliaments,

It is a privilege for me to welcome you today in Riga for the discussion on the topical EU issues – the accomplishments of the Latvian Presidency and tasks ahead.

Looking back at the five months of intensive work, I can now say that this has been a dynamic and active period for the Latvian Presidency.

The European Union is dealing with constantly changing and unpredictable global environment; it faces new opportunities and challenges. We have been working resolutely and relentlessly to reach EU's priorities and accomplish everyday goals. We have also been able to respond swiftly to the emerging challenges and crises.

Along with the joint efforts to restore economic growth and well-being in Europe, we also had to focus on security issues and foreign policy challenges.

These challenges are a constant reminder that we need to protect and improve freedom and welfare, security and stability both in Europe and globally.

However, decisive action and faith in European values have always helped us to reach a common ground.

And I believe the Latvian Presidency has helped the European Union to stay firmly on this track and move forward.

Members of parliaments,

The Latvian Presidency coincided with the beginning of a new institutional cycle in the European Union. It brought new ideas, new vigour and new working methods for cooperation among the European Union's institutions.

I am certain that only by working together will the European Union's institutions and member states be able to achieve the intended results, succeed and increase the trust of the EU citizens.

Therefore, the Conference of Parliamentary Committees for Union Affairs of Parliaments of the European Union is crucial in ensuring synergies between the national parliaments and the European Parliament, as well as national and European efforts.

Our common task is to increase the dynamics of democracy, popular support and trust in the European Union.

Therefore, Latvian Presidency has organised a diverse range of inter-parliamentary meetings to discuss topics such as digital economy, inclusive growth and the Eastern Partnership.

It is crucial to have parliamentary input in these areas, and we are determined to work hand-in-hand with our parliamentarians.

Members of parliaments,

Together with the European Commission and the European Parliament we have worked hard and diligently on EU's legislative acts.

We commenced trialogues on **25** legislative acts, and completed the procedure on **10** of them. By the end of June we hope to begin trialogues on another **18** legislative acts, as well as conclude yet another **16**.

As you know, Latvia proposed to focus on three priorities during its Presidency: competitive Europe, digital Europe and engaged Europe.

However, life brought about changes. Terrorist attacks in Europe and the waves of migrants in the Mediterranean demanded immediate response on EU's part.

The Latvian Presidency has been steadily moving forward with the Council's agenda.

Let me point out our most significant achievements so far.

First, the European Fund for Strategic Investments.

The pragmatic approach of the Latvian Presidency has led to a quick Council agreement on one of the main initiatives facilitating the EU's competitiveness, namely, **the European Fund for Strategic Investments (EFSI)**. On the morning of 28 May, the 8th triologue was completed, and the Latvian Presidency struck a political agreement with the European Parliament. We have met the ambitious deadlines set by the European Council in December, and the Fund will start operating some time in September.

The Fund will help us attract investment of at least 315 billion to the EU's economy. Investments will go towards development of infrastructure, research, innovation and development, education and training, health care, information and communication technologies, development of energy sector, as well as support for small- and medium-sized enterprises. The EFSI will support a number of projects and thus facilitate long-term influx of funds into the actual economy of the European Union.

Second, European Energy Union.

We are glad that on 6 February in Riga, during a high-level conference, the formation of the European Energy Union began. The Energy Union is our response to the current geopolitical situation in Europe and it will increase the energy independence of the European Union. Establishment of the Energy Union is one of the major priorities of the Latvian Presidency.

We have chaired Council discussions on the Energy Union proposal both on ministerial and expert level. Outcomes of these discussions will form the basis for member state contributions in further development of the Energy Union and proposed action on behalf of the European Commission. We have focussed on three issues: (1) regional cooperation as the governance framework for the Energy Union, (2) reasonable consumer energy prices, and (3) availability of funding for energy projects.

Latvian Presidency has also contributed to the implementation of the common **energy and climate targets**. In preparation for the Climate conference in Paris, the Presidency was actively drafting the opinion of the European Union. Member states have agreed to reduce the European Union's impact on climate change after 2020, expecting that by 2030, the European Union will reduce its emissions by at least 40% in comparison to level of 1990. We have thus proved our commitment to continue implementing measures aimed at mitigating climate change and our desire to reach an ambitious agreement during the Climate Conference in Paris.

Third, Digital Single Market.

The Latvian Presidency continued the work of previous presidencies on several legislative acts essential for establishing the **Digital Single Market**. We have worked intensively on legislative proposals regarding Telecoms Single Market, Data Protection, as well as Network and Information Security.

It should be noted that the new approach taken by the Latvian Presidency regarding roaming provided a new impulse to the **Telecoms Single**

Market proposal. We hope that tomorrow, on 2 June, during the 3rd informal triologue, a balanced solution will be reached thus opening up the possibility for the reduction of roaming prices in the European Union.

The **data protection reform package** is one of priorities of the Latvian Presidency.

During the Council meeting in March, the Latvian Presidency reached an agreement on several chapters of the General Data Protection Regulation. The approved general data processing principles will guarantee legal, fair and transparent data processing. In addition, the approved one-stop-shop principle will enable each individual to refer to the data protection authority in their country of residence regardless of the country in which the violation has occurred/was registered.

The Latvian Presidency expects to reach a general agreement on the entire text of the regulation during the Council meeting on 15 – 16 June, and we hope to start the negotiations with the European Parliament before the end of the Latvian Presidency.

We hope that June negotiations with the European Parliament will conclude with a compromise on the **proposed Network and Information Security Directive** which is aimed at providing secure and reliable digital environment in the European Union.

Along with the publication of the Digital Single Market Strategy, the Latvian Presidency continues discussions with industry councils on specific aspects of the Strategy as part of the preparation for the European

Council on 25 – 26 June. Discussions will identify the areas requiring the guidelines of the European Council.

The Digital Assembly „One Europe, one Digital Single Market,” scheduled for 17 – 18 June in Riga, will constitute an inclusive, future-oriented discussion focussing on the development of the Digital Single Market and other significant issues such as trust, access and compatibility, digital economy for businesses and consumers, facilitation of e-society and digital skills. Although the Digital Assembly formally may not be considered a part of the preparation for the European Council, it will, nevertheless, reflect discussions among ministers and thus send a signal about the significance of the Digital Single Market Strategy.

Fourth, the fight against terrorism.

Terrorist threats was and still remains one of the most serious challenges for the Latvian Presidency. Following the terrorist attack in Paris, the Latvian Presidency reacted immediately to prepare a single European response.

During the February meeting of the European Council, the heads of states and governments adopted a set of priority measures aimed at strengthening the fight against terrorism. In March, EU member state Ministers of the Interior identified steps to be taken by the end of the first half of 2015: systematic checking of travel documents and passengers on the external borders of the EU, monitoring of online content that promotes terrorism and radicalisation, and the fight against illegal trade in firearms.

Much has been done already in the area of systematic checking of travel documents on the external borders of the EU. Moreover, we are looking forward to risk indicators that the Commission will provide for in-depth screening of passengers. We are actively working on setting up a special EUROPOL terrorism and extremism cyber unit set to be operational by 1 July.

The Latvian Presidency applauds the commitment to agree on a pivotal tool for fighting terrorism, **the EU Passenger Name Record**. This system will allow the processing of air passengers' data to prevent terrorism and severe crimes, and to identify foreign terrorist fighters, some of whom are EU citizens.

Currently the **EU Internal Security Strategy 2015-2020** is being revised. The revised strategy is scheduled for adoption in the EU Justice and Home Affairs Council on 15 June. The strategy will cover the three main security threats: terrorism and radicalisation, organised crime, and cybercrime.

We will report during the June Council meeting on the progress achieved in these areas.

Fifth, migration.

Migration in the Mediterranean region is another serious challenge. On 19 April a tragic and shocking event took place off the shores of Libya, when a ship with approximately 700 immigrants capsized, and only a handful of people were saved from drowning. The Latvian Presidency responded immediately by including the migration issue in the agenda of the

upcoming Council meetings, as well as convening for an extraordinary Council meeting on migration on 23 April.

Extraordinary Council meeting of 23 April adopted urgent measures aimed at resolving the Mediterranean crisis. Short-term priority measures are designed to prevent similar tragedies in future. The heads of states and governments agreed to increase the presence of FRONTEX Agency in the Mediterranean and triple its resources. Proposed amendments to the budget are under consideration and ministers of finance of the EU are planning to adopt them on 19 June.

The Council of the European Union pays particular attention to measures against human trafficking. On 18 May, foreign and defence ministers of the EU agreed on the formation of a special operation within the Common Security and Defence Policy aimed at disrupting the criminal networks of human traffickers and smugglers in the Mediterranean. Concurrently, **the dedication** to prevent the causes of illegal migration has intensified.

Furthermore, in May, the Commission came up with proposals on European agenda for migration. We want to make further progress within measures and initiatives aimed at optimising advantages of legal migration and offering protection to those in need through addressing the problem of illegal migration and effectively managing EU's external borders.

We will report on the progress achieved at the Justice and Home Affairs Council and the European Council in June.

Sixth, the Eastern Partnership

On 21 – 22 May the Eastern Partnership Summit was held in Riga, and it was undoubtedly the most significant and the largest event organised by our Presidency. The Summit gave yet another opportunity for the EU to confirm its commitment to develop further relations with the countries of the Eastern Partnership.

Regardless of the complicated political environment, the Riga Summit was a success. We have reached a compromise regarding an ambitious summit declaration, and we have clearly stated that the Eastern Partnership is a long-term policy which continues to evolve. We reaffirmed our continuous support to our Eastern partners.

The EU continues to support **Ukraine**. During the past 6 months we have demonstrated that the EU is able to maintain a uniform, consistent and appropriate policy regardless of Russia's attempts to influence individual member states. The EU must stick to its unified policy, and show its readiness to increase the restrictive measures in case of further escalation of the situation in the Eastern Ukraine.

Seventh, external security.

Since the beginning of this years, the Latvian Presidency has facilitated a number of discussions on external security both within the Council and in other formats, thus preparing for the European Council of 25 – 26 June. Heads of state and government will focus European Council meeting on Common Security and Defence Policy, in order to assess the progress

achieved since 2013 and recommend further steps towards external security.

In the light of recent developments – Russia’s aggression in Ukraine and threats of radical terrorist groups in the Southern Europe – the EU has to reconsider its security vision and strengthen strategic communication, early warning, cyber defence and other capabilities in order to increase resistance against hybrid threats posed by individual states and non-governmental groups.

The conclusions of the Foreign Council meeting in January and the European Council meeting held in May envisage specific measures for strengthening the EU’s **strategic communication**. The High Representative of the EU, together with the EU member states and institutions will draft an action plan on strategic communication by the June European Council meeting in order to offer a countermeasure against Russia’s disinformation campaigns.

In June the European Council will decide on the European Security Strategy review process. The reviewed European Security Strategy should increase internal and external security of Europe, focus on the stability in the Eastern and Southern neighbourhood, and increase the EU’s role globally.

Members of parliaments,

The Latvian Presidency has been diligently trying to attain tangible results, strengthen recovery of the European Union and facilitate its future progress.

We are strongly committed to continue this diligent work till the end of our Presidency.

We will not complete the work on all proposals and initiatives; however, I hope that our pragmatic approach will lay solid foundation for successful consideration of relevant issues during upcoming presidencies.

The European Union will succeed only if its institutions and member states work together.