

**Saeimas priekšsēdētājas Ināras Mūrnieces atklāšanas uzruna
ES dalībvalstu parlamentu Eiropas lietu komiteju
(COSAC) Plenārsesijā
2015. gada 1.jūnijā**

Mr Vice-President of the European Commission,
Excellencies,
Distinguished Guests,

It is my great pleasure to open the 53rd Plenary Meeting of the COSAC!

This is one of the final meetings in the parliamentary dimension of the Latvian Presidency. In a month, our first Presidency in the Council of the European Union will be over. Soon we will miss the many events and guests who visited Latvia.

I'm proud of my country! Twenty-five years ago we renewed our independence. From an occupied country, non-existent on political maps – today Latvia successfully holds the Presidency of the Council of the EU. I consider this is great success for my country.

During the Presidency, we had to be ready to react and to adapt to changing situations – doing everything that was expected from us, and more. We had to be flexible and efficient when circumstances demanded a rapid response – be it in the terrorist attacks in Paris, Belgium and Copenhagen, or the crisis related to migrants crossing the Mediterranean. We remained ready to act at critical moments.

Within the Parliamentary dimension of the Latvian Presidency, we have organised six high-level inter-parliamentary conferences and many other events. We also experienced a new tradition to be. For the first time, the College of Commissioners, during its traditional call to the incoming Presidency, attended our Parliament. We welcome the Commission's commitment to the political dialogue with national parliaments – this demonstrates the importance of the role that national parliaments are playing also on the European level.

Latvia's parliament is actively engaged in the current EU debate in how to address the migration crisis. While this problem demands a swift response, we also need broader engagement and trust from the public. These EU decisions influence the lives of five hundred million European citizens. The national parliaments are intermediaries between the EU decisions and citizens. Therefore I want to highlight that we should be more involved when emergencies arise.

Developments in the past couple of years attest to the strengthening role of national parliaments in the EU's decision-making. At the EU Speakers Conference in Rome in April, we agreed that the contributions of national parliaments should be made at the early stages of the legislative process. The national parliaments should be more pro-active in setting the EU's agenda, for example by finding the best approach for applying the so-called "green card" procedure. I am glad that the Latvian Presidency takes place during a time of intense discussions on these matters, and I look forward to your debate in the COSAC meeting.

Dear Colleagues,

Our citizens face problems that demand European-level solutions - be it with regard to youth unemployment, the economic crisis, illegal immigration, or an aggressive neighbour.

It is to be warmly welcomed that this COSAC meeting will address several of these issues. The establishment of the Energy Union is a necessary step toward Europe's energy independence. The Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership will help in building prosperity for citizens. And the EU must address the security challenges in the South and East. The discussion on these questions and finding solutions for them among our EU Affairs Committees is very much needed.

When I spoke at the COSAC meeting in February, I focused on the security challenges in the East, in Ukraine. How are we doing with this situation today?

We can acknowledge that the unity of the EU is being tested. We have agreed that the EU sanctions must remain in place until Russia delivers on its commitments under the Minsk Agreements. I am convinced that the sanctions must not be lifted so long as Russia continues ignoring the implementation of the Minsk Agreements.

In this context, I welcome the important joint message from the inter-parliamentary assembly of Ukraine, Poland and Lithuania, calling on Russia to immediately withdraw troops from Ukraine and encouraging the EU to toughen the sanctions. This is a concrete example how the national parliaments play a pro-active role in guarding our democratic values around the world.

By combining our efforts we are stronger in promoting and protecting our democratic values. Only together we can deliver results that make a real difference to our citizens in their everyday lives.

In conclusion, I would like to thank all of you for support during our Presidency. We are grateful for the constructive cooperation we have had during this time.

I wish you productive discussions and a pleasant stay in Latvia. And I hope to see you in Riga again.